



September 2001 - Rs. 10/-

CHANDAMAMA



Ashiq the Clever
Page 11

S. Gandhi Pyya

Orissa

The Soul of India

Orissa : beyond a poet's pen & an artist's brush

An exotic pilgrimage for aesthetic eyes, Orissa looms large with its stupendous relics: the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri, having the car festival as its crowning glory; the Chilika lake, oscillating between its thoughtful silence & music galore, thanks to her winged visitors; the wildlife that eternally basks in sensational wildness & ecstatic beauty; the breathtaking beaches wedded to gorgeous blue seas....Orissa is a painting that speaks. A reservoir of art & culture, whether it is in the handwork of pipli or in our very own "Chhow" & "Odissi" Dance, Orissa provokes curiosity. Orissa is one destination your life-span should not skip.



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Visit
Konark Festival!
December, 1-5

Welcome to Bhubaneswar, the temple city of India, where almost 500 temples vie for your attention.

It is said, a pilgrimage to Bhubaneswar should begin with a dip in Bindusagar. An interesting legend about this lake says that once when Goddess Parvati was wandering through the forests, she felt thirsty. Lord Siva created a lake and filled it with drops of water drawn from all the rivers and lakes of India.

The Lingaraja temple is the biggest. Dedicated to Lord Siva, it was built in A.D. 11th century. This 46m tall temple is said to be the best example of typical Orissa temple architecture.

The Mukteswar temple is a beautiful

shrine in sandstone. Its wonderful arched gateway and the intricately sculpted figurines are eye-catching.

A few kilometres to the southeast of the Lingaraja temple is Sisupalgarh, a fort city, the origins of which can be traced back to the 3rd century B.C.

Dhuli is 8 km south of the city. This is where Emperor Asoka embraced Buddhism. The first of the rock-cut edicts that Asoka got inscribed can be seen here.

At the Dhaulagiri hills, a very modern monument to peace hearkens back to the bloody Kalinga War. A little away from the city are the cave complexes of Khandagiri and Udayagiri, which are remnants of Jain culture.

A QUIZ FOR YOU!

For children up to 14 years

- Which is the town close to Bhubaneswar known for its appliqué work?

- These caves have sculpted figurines which speak of a classical dance tradition that existed for many centuries. Name the caves.

- Along with Bhubaneswar, these two towns form the Big Three temple towns of Orissa. Name them.

Write your answers legibly in the blank space provided, fill in the coupon below and send the entry to

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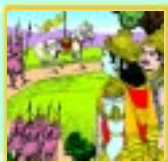
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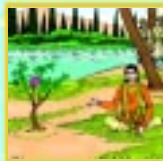
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**Saga of India**

29

**The Melody Flower**

19

**Saga of Vishnu**

51

**Brahmin versus Bidhata**

36

CONTENTS

★ Hair by Hair (A Hodja Story) ...6 ★ Many Horizons: Henry the Chamaleon-Ruskin Bond...8 ★ Ashiq the Clever (A story from Kirghistan)...11 ★ Unsolved Mysteries—Puzzling images...15 ★ The Melody Flower(*New tales of King Vikram and the Vetala*) ...19 ★ Rejoicing a royal return (Festivals of India) ...25 ★ Saga of India-20 ...29 ★ Celestial Dance ...34 ★ Brahmin versus Bidhata (A Folk Tale from Bengal) ...36 ★ Birbal (*Men of Wit*) ...42 ★ News Flash ...44 ★ Get one absolutely free ...46 ★ Know Your India (Quiz)...50 ★ Saga of Vishnu-16 ...51 ★ Tipu the Sultan of Mysore (*Pages from the Past*) ...56 ★ How the Mynah changed colours ...58 ★ Garuda the Invincible-9 (*Comics*)...61 ★ Towards Better English ...65 ★ Photo Caption Contest...66

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A link with the past

A magazine highlighting on Education in Japan tells us of little children being taught how to light a fire without using matchsticks, how they learn history more from visits to museums than from their textbooks. Teachers in that country make the best use of nature and the ancient lore preserved in places like museums.

This is not to decry textbooks and the thousands of words printed in them. If they have failed to arouse interest in children, the books or the people who prepare them are not to be blamed. We tend to forget that there are sources from where children can derive knowledge, information, education directly.

We seem to have totally lost touch with not only our culture, but even with our flora and fauna. In a vast land like India, with such a variety of life around, each state has something to be proud of, to be shared with the people of other states. That is what has prompted us to present the festival of a particular state, the dance form with its origins in another state, but with potential to integrate the people of different regions, and the folklore, though belonging to a particular state, having a universal appeal.

It is often said that travels to other regions take us closer to the people living in those regions. Our readers will experience a kind of travel when they read about a dance form, festival, or folklore.

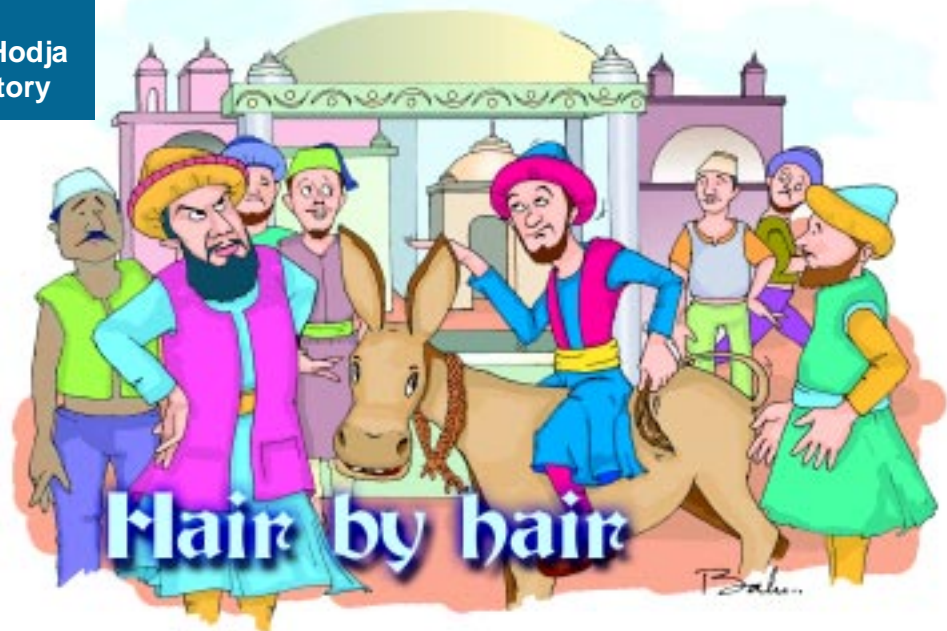
It was our philosopher-President Dr.S. Radhakrishnan, whose birth anniversary falls on September 5, who once said: "It takes centuries to make a little history; it takes centuries of history to make a tradition."

Let every Indian remember that our tradition is rooted in the country's hoary past, and not miss the main link between the past and the future.

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A very knowledgeable scholar was coming into town for a debate. Scared of facing him, all the scholars of the court had left town giving one excuse or another. The Sultan was very worried. He didn't want to lose face. So, he sent a messenger to Hodja Naseeruddin.

"Oh, is that so? Let me meet this scholar," said the Hodja hopping onto his donkey. At the city square, the Hodja met the scholar, followed by his retinue of disciples, making his way to the Sultan's palace.

"No outsider can meet the scholars of our city unless he defeats a common man in debate," declared the Hodja to the scholar. "You can put your questions to me. I'm a common man."

"Very well," said the arrogant scholar. "Where is the centre of the Earth?"

"Down here," said the Hodja immediately. "If you don't believe me

you can measure the earth yourself."

"How many stars are there in the sky?" the scholar asked next.

"There are as many stars as there are hairs on my donkey. You may count for yourself," replied the Hodja.

"And how many hairs do I have in my beard?" asked the scholar sarcastically.

"As many hairs as there are in my donkey's tail," was the answer.

"Prove it," said the scholar haughtily.

"Very well," said the Hodja. "Now you pull a hair from my donkey's tail and I'll pull a hair from your beard. Let's go on like this. By the time your chin is bare, my donkey's tail will also be hairless. Shall we start?" and the Hodja leaned forward to grasp the scholar's beard.

But before he could, the scholar turned around and walked away fast right out of the town.



This came by e-mail from Meena:

I am an ardent reader of *Chandamama*. In fact, I felt very happy to see the magazine back in circulation. I like each and every story in it. I hope you will make the content more interesting.

This came from reader Trilochan Ojha of Bhubaneshwar:

Congratulations for the new items added to the regular features. The historical events of the world, accompanied by the socio-political developments in India were very much appealing. I have been an avid reader of *Chandamama* from my school days. I was sad when the publication was suspended in 1998-99. I felt as if I were going without my companion, as well as a responsible mentor. I appreciate deeply the moral values inculcated in the readers through the stories in the magazine. They impart both knowledge and a sense to understand the philosophy of the great Indian civilization. I wish a glorious future for the magazine.

Reader M. Varghese

A PICK FROM OUR
MAIL BAG



Reader Premanand Thayyil of Andheri (East), Mumbai, does not agree with King Vikram's explanation in the Vikram-Vetala story published in May. He says: Ramachari knew that one *could* worship god only at a temple. He believed in worshipping *only* god. He wanted only god and no one else to purify him and *lead* him to the path of salvation. Ramachari was *not* arrogant. He had taken a vow not to leave the temple till he received proof of his purity. He was immersed in deep prayer when the king's minister approached him. Ramachari did not move out of the temple for thirty years, of which he had spent twelve years in intense worship of god. Therefore, he was more qualified than the yogi to hand over the Tulsi leaves to King Chandrasena. The yogi was egoistic ("I am afraid you're going on a wild goose chase").

If the yogi was truly wise, he should have sent the king to Ramachari and not insisted on handing the leaves himself.

Would any of our readers find Mr. Premanand's arguments acceptable?

- Editor

Reader Dhruv N. Kundra (15) of New Delhi writes:

The July issue was excellent. The cover drawing was very beautiful. Garuda the Invincible is one of the most interesting picture-stories. I would suggest that you publish more picture-stories.

This is the story of Henry, our pet chameleon. Chameleons are in a class by themselves and are no ordinary reptiles. From their nearest relatives, the lizards, they are easily distinguished by certain outstanding characteristics. A chameleon's tongue is as long as its body. On its head is a rigid crest which looks like a fireman's helmet. His limbs are long and slender, and his fingers and toes are more developed than those of other reptiles.

Henry's most remarkable characteristics were his eyes. They were not beautiful. But his left eye was quite independent of his right, and he could move one without disturbing the other. This gave him a horrible squint. Each eyeball, raised out of his head,

was wobbled up and down, backwards and forwards, quite independently of its partner. Reptiles are not gifted like us with binocular vision. They do not see an object with both eyes at once.

Whenever I visited Henry, he would treat me with great caution, sitting perfectly still on his perch with his back to me. But his nearest eye would move round like the beam of a searchlight until it had got me well in focus. Then it would stop, and the other eye would proceed to carry out an independent survey of its own in some different direction. Henry took nobody

on trust, and treated my friendliest gestures with grave suspicion.

Tiring of his attitude, I would tickle him gently in the ribs with my finger. This always threw him into a great rage. He

would blow himself up to an enormous size, his lungs filling his body with air. He would

sit up on his hind legs, swaying from side to side, hoping to overawe me with his increased

dimensions. Opening his mouth very wide, he would let out an angry hiss of resentment. But his protests went no further. He did not bite. Non-violence was his creed.

Many people believe the

Henry a Chameleon



chameleon is a dangerous and poisonous reptile. When I was visiting a friend in the country, I came upon a noisy scene at the garden gate. Men were shouting, hurling stones, and

even in his wildest moments he would simply wait for me to take it out again. I suppose he could bite. His rigid jaws carried a number of fine pointed teeth. But Henry was rightly convinced that these were given to him solely for the purpose of chewing his food.

Provided I was patient, Henry was willing to take food from my hands. This he did very swiftly. His tongue was a sort of boomerang which went back to him with the food, or insect victim, attached to it. Before I could realise what had happened, the grasshopper held between my fingers would be lodged between Henry's jaws.

The ancients believed that the chameleon lived on air. Perhaps they came by this belief because of the chameleon's capacity to undertake a long fast. Henry once went on a hunger-strike and did not take any food for over a month. But normally he had a healthy appetite, and loved a good supply of grasshoppers, flies, and small insects of various kinds.

During the rains, when all sorts of winged insects came floundering into the house, Henry would snap them up joyfully. He drank water readily, either by licking up the drops with his tongue or by running his jaws along the edges of leaves to catch the dew. We used to supply his wants by sprinkling the leaves in his cage with water.

brandishing sticks. The cause of all this was a chameleon who had been discovered sunning himself on a shrub. The gardener declared that it was something capable of poisoning people at a distance of 20 feet, and as a result the entire household had risen in arms. I was in time to save the chameleon from certain death and brought the little reptile home. That was how Henry came to live with us.

Henry was a harmless creature. If I were to put my finger in his mouth,



The best known accomplishment of the chameleon is its power to change colour. It is a power possessed by many lizards. Our common bloodsucker can change the colour of its coat very rapidly; but the chameleon is still quicker. It is impossible to say what colour it is. An individual may, in the course of a few days, appear in half a dozen different garbs, not counting the mixed shades and minor combinations. Henry was constantly surprising us with new colour patterns, although we thought we knew his complete range of suitings.

His most usual workaday suit was a mixture of dark brown and green set off with a few white blotches along his flanks. If the day was dark and cloudy, he responded by changing to a pale-green. His night-suit was pale, almost a sickly yellow. The patterns of his marking depended much on his humour. He gave off his best effects when he was in a rage. When properly aroused, Henry broke out in vivid red streaks and blotches. The belief that a chameleon adapts its colour to its immediate surroundings is true only to a limited extent. Henry would keep to a dark, almost black livery, even when surrounded by a foliage of tender green. You can certainly disbelieve

the story of the chameleon who, when placed on a Scotsman's tartan, "burst" himself in a brave attempt to copy its brilliant hues.

Only one species of chameleon is found in India, namely the common chameleon. Most species are found in Africa. In captivity they make interesting pets, but different individuals show different characteristics. Some soon adapt themselves to a new mode of life, but others remain sullen and refuse all food. These rebels should be given their freedom. Henry remained with us for two years, and was hale and hearty during all that time. But one fresh spring morning, finding his door open, he set out to explore the garden, and never came back. I thought I saw him once, sunning himself in the rockery, but when I approached, he scuttled away and would not show himself. He had probably found other playmates of his own kind.



September 2001

Tales from other lands
(Kirghizstan)

Ashiq the Clever

Far away, in the mountains of Central Asia, is the country called Kirghizstan. In that beautiful land of tall mountains and sparkling streams, there was a little shepherd boy called Ashiq. He was an orphan, and when he was ten years old, a rich man, a *bei* of the village with many flocks of goats and sheep and camel, took him under his wing and gave him the job of grazing his flocks of goats. Every day Ashiq would take the goats out to graze in the meadows outside the village where sweet smelling grass grew in plenty. Then, once the goats had eaten their fill, he would take them back in the evening. The days were long and lonely, and Ashiq spent his time learning about the wild creatures of the land.

One day, as he was whiling away his time whittling a piece of wood, Ashiq noticed a frog with a broken leg. Being a kind and gentle boy, he picked up the frog and mended its leg with a twig as a splint. He then took it home. He dug a pit near the tent where

he lived and filled it with water. He let the frog into that pool of water and tended it carefully.

One day, his boss, the rich man, saw him with the frog and got very angry. "Why do you waste time on a silly frog when you should be looking after my flock?" he shouted. "Get rid of it at once. I don't want to see any slimy creatures in my house!"

So Ashiq sadly walked down to the river with the frog to let it into the water. Just as he was about to set the frog gently down on the bank, the frog spoke. "You're a kind and good boy. You saved my life. I've nothing to give you, except this magic pebble. Keep it with you, and when you are in trouble, make your wish to the pebble and it will help you."

After that, the frog did a little jig, jumping on one foot and then on the





other, brought out a green pebble from its mouth and gave it to Ashiq. Then it jumped into the water and disappeared. Ashiq picked up the pebble and made his way back to the village. As he neared the village, he saw that something had happened. People were running about here and there. Some women were sobbing loudly, and old men with grey beards were talking excitedly under a big walnut tree.

Ashiq went near the group under the tree to find out what had happened. There he saw a rider on a horseback giving the news to the villagers:

“The big Khan, Kalakhan the evil, he is planning ...” he was saying.

“Oh dear! What does he plan now?” asked one of the old men.

Everyone had heard of Kalakhan. He was the chief of a neighbouring land, and he was mean, cruel, and greedy.

“He wants to capture all the people in the mountains and take away

whatever they have. When the people in the villages protested, he said he would leave them alone provided they sent him a messenger who went, not riding a horse or a camel, nor walking on his two feet, not travelling on the road or across the fields,” said the horseman all out of breath. “The other villages had sent messengers with rich gifts, but none had come back. It’s our turn now to send someone.”

Everyone started talking at once, suggesting names or protesting when a name was mentioned. All the talk got them nowhere till Ashiq stepped forward and said, “I will go.”

“You?” asked one of the grey beards. “Did you hear the Khan’s conditions?”

“Yes, I did,” answered Ashiq. “I won’t ride a horse or a camel. Nor will I go on my two feet. I’ll ride a goat. I won’t go along the road or ride across the fields. I’ll ride along the kerb.”

The people gathered were struck by Ashiq’s words, and so they gave him an old billy goat to ride and gave him the largest camel in the village as a gift for the Khan and sent him off.

Thus Ashiq rode to the Khan’s camp. When he reached the camp, he looked around and approached the biggest *yurt* (the tents in which people in those lands live).

When the Khan learnt why Ashiq had come, he was furious. “You cheeky boy? How dare you appear before me like this?” he demanded.

“Well, I’ve fulfilled all your conditions,” said Ashiq boldly. “I’ve neither come by horse nor camel. I rode a goat. I didn’t come along the road or across the fields. I rode on the kerb.”

“You insolent fellow! Wasn’t there anyone bigger than you in your village who could come to me?” screamed the Khan.

“This camel is the largest being in our village. You can talk to him if you want,” was Ashiq’s bold answer.

The furious Khan thundered again, “Couldn’t they find anyone older than you in that village of yours?”

“The goat is the oldest in our village. You can talk to him,” said Ashiq, nonchalantly.

This made the Khan really angry. He threw Ashiq into prison and told him that unless he paid a ransom of a hundred black race horses, five hundred camels, and a thousand brocade robes, he would be put to death. Besides all that, the Khan also wanted a white yurt with ten windows. Ashiq was told that if all that did not appear before daybreak he would be crushed to death under the Khan’s fiercest horses.

Poor Ashiq did not know where to turn in that strange place. He was certain that he would die a painful death in the morning. Suddenly he remembered the pebble in his pocket. So, he took out the pebble and rubbed it and wished hard for the amount of wealth that Kalakhan had demanded of him. At once a beautiful girl appeared with big black eyes and a long braid of thick black hair.

She listened to Ashiq’s tale of woe and then told him, “Everything will be arranged. But be careful with the Khan. He’s very cruel and merciless. Here, keep this comb, needle, and mirror. You may need them to save yourself.” Then she disappeared with a flip of her long braid.

The next day as the Khan’s men came out of their tents, they found the yard was full. There were a hundred horses, five hundred camels, and a thousand brocade dresses, just as the Khan had desired. And what’s more,



beside his yurt stood an even larger one, white in colour and with ten windows.

They ran in to tell the Khan. The Khan was very happy with all this wealth, but he did not show his pleasure, because he did not want to let Ashiq go. He asked Ashiq if he would work for him. But Ashiq boldly refused, saying, "I don't want any part of your wickedness."

This angered the Khan, but he let him go, as he said a promise was a promise. But the wicked man secretly told his men to follow Ashiq and kill him.

As Ashiq made his way home, he heard the thunder of hooves following him. He turned to find the Khan's men on his heels. Then he remembered the things the beautiful girl had given him

and he took the comb out and threw it behind him. At once a huge forest of trees came up. The Khan's men could not get through the forest and had to return. The Khan got furious with the men, and though they begged for mercy, he chopped their heads off.

Then he sent his personal guards to get Ashiq. Now when Ashiq heard the sound of hooves, he threw the needle behind him and at once a tall mountain sprang up. And once more the Khan's men had to return without harming Ashiq. This time the Khan got even more furious, and he chopped off all their heads.

He then asked for his faithful horse Tulpar and mounted it and rode hell for leather after Ashiq, determined to kill him. His faithful horse ran through the forest and jumped over the mountain and almost caught up with Ashiq. When Ashiq heard the horse coming, he threw the mirror behind him. At once a huge lake appeared. The Khan thought his horse could jump over the lake and spurred him on, but the horse fell into the lake with the Khan. The Khan struggled for a while, but he had never learnt how to swim and so drowned. However, the horse swam ashore after a while.

Ashiq mounted Tulpar and rode triumphantly into his village. All the villagers made much of him, and all the grey beards said he was the wisest and cleverest of them all.

-Uma Raman

Chandamama



PUZZLING IMAGES

In the late 1920s, a small aircraft was one day flying over a vast, desolate, and arid land. It was on a mission to search for water when it stumbled upon an astounding discovery.

Down below, as far as the eye could see, was an awe-inspiring sight! On the bare and lonely plateau of Nazca, in the southern coast of Peru, hosts of enormous line drawings and gigantic figures were deftly etched into the earth's surface. This immense canvas of starkly beautiful art work spread over a staggering area of 500 sq. km.

Nestling together in one place were about 70 images of birds, animals, plants, flowers, and trees. There was the figure of a monkey, almost 400 ft long, and 300 ft wide, larger than a football-field. A condor, a sea bird, 450 ft long and humming-birds, about 200 ft from wingtip to wingtip, were shown as in full flight. A pelican measuring an unimaginable 1,000 ft was also present among 18 other varieties of the feathered creatures.

A long killer whale, 200 ft long, seemed to swim. Woolly spiders, measuring 150 ft, crept stealthily along, whereas a little duckling was caught in a playful mood. There could also be seen figures of a sly fox, cautious lizards, around 620 ft long, dog, fish, and some unidentifiable creatures, too. It looked like a huge two-dimensional "zoo" in the dry, lifeless desert.

Then, there on the tableland of Nazca, also called the Pampa Colorado, meaning coloured plain, a host of different geometric forms and shapes, about 900 of them, lay scattered in great uniformity. They included spirals, circles, and star-shaped cluster of lines, elegant tapering triangles and more than 13,000 perfectly straight lines.

Some of the wedge-like designs had sides which were more than 2,500 ft long. The longest of the straight lines ran almost 9 miles, over hills and valleys, through difficult terrains, sometimes cutting through tough vegetation, but never deviating from its straight course.





On the side of a dry hill nearby was the curious figure which was later called the Owl Man. His face resembled that of an owl. Its right arm was raised and pointed to the sky, and the other hand was downward to the ground. He seemed to have heavy boots and big round eyes, staring owlishly forward. Surely, he did not belong to any known era of culture. There were other drawings, too, depicting human forms, which were equally strange and peculiar. Were these figures those of visitors from other planets?

Although more than 2,000 years old, these spectacular line drawings on the lonely desert floor of Nazca were not known to the world at large until the



discovery made by that historic flight. At ground level, for centuries they had been indecipherable and “invisible”, seen only as mere ruts in the desert or shallow depressions. The Nazca Lines, a term applied in general to all the etchings on the plateau, can be seen for what they are only from the air. Some of the images are so large that they can be viewed only from a height of not less than 1,000 feet.

Why would anyone so painstakingly make figures that could be seen and appreciated from the air in an age when there were no airplanes? How could those ancient people visualize and execute drawings of such magnitude that can be seen only from the air? What was the purpose of these strange lines and figures? Alas, there are no answers yet, and the significance of the Nazca Lines has remained largely shrouded in mystery.

Known as “one of the baffling enigmas of archaeology”, the Nazca Lines have perplexed scholars, scientists, mathematicians, explorers, and astronomers alike, who have tried to unravel their secrets.

The Swiss writer, Erich Von Daniken, has put forward a startling theory in his

famous book, *Chariots of the Gods?* He says, the plateau was so designed for the convenience of the visitors from outer space to land and take off their flying vehicles! Even James W. Moseley opines that since the drawings were largely invisible from the ground, those ancient people must have “constructed their huge markings as signals to interplanetary visitors... that occasionally visited them”. But the desert floor at Nazca is so soft that it would not support the landing of any aircraft. So the plateau surely could not have been a landing area.

It was the American researcher and explorer, Paul Kosok, who was the first to make a systematic study of the mysterious Nazca Lines 12 years after their discovery in 1927. He concluded that the lines marked astronomical alignments and the plain acted as a giant observatory, which he called “the largest astronomy book in the world”.

But Maria Reiche, who devoted almost 50 years trying to find their significance, believed that the lines represented a gigantic astronomical calendar. The precision and the beauty of the lines, in her view, showed that they were the creations of a most cultured and aesthetic society. Thanks to her untiring efforts and perseverance, the UNESCO added the Nazca site to its World Heritage List in 1994.

Tony Morrison, an English explorer, suggested that the straight lines, running into miles, could have been pathways linking wayside shrines according to the ancient traditions, the shrines being as simple as a small pile of stones.

How did the ancient inhabitants of Nazca depict so accurately the image of some of the animals, birds and insects that never lived nor were seen in the region, like the whale, the monkey and one of the rare species of the Amazonian spider? It is



astounding how the spider has been reproduced with such minute anatomical details, which are normally visible only under a microscope!

Did they know the technique to fly in hot-air balloons in order to appreciate their extraordinary creations?

Perhaps, hidden in these lines, there are deep secrets yet unknown to man! Indeed, this dry and desolate plateau of Nazca is a great and baffling puzzle!



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King Vikram
and the Vetala

THE MELODY FLOWER

A determined King Vikramaditya walked up to the ancient tree again. He brought the corpse down and carrying it on his shoulder, started off towards the cremation ground in silence. Then the Vetala spoke from inside the corpse: "O King, normally monarchs are used to an easy life. During their reign, they wish to experience as many pleasures of life as they may. You, too, are a monarch and yet you're staying away from these worldly pursuits, undergoing here the most terrible hardships. Surely, there must be a compelling reason behind this. Probably, it is in



order to fulfil the wishes of some emperor and, thereby, to attain some goal that you are pursuing me without fear for your life. You forget that cremation grounds are abodes of demons, ogres, poisonous snakes, and bloodthirsty beasts. You may or may not succeed in your pursuits, but through them you shall forever be bound to the present and shall be unable to attain immortality. It is impossible for a king like you to live a life that even monks and sages would find hard. You seem to have undertaken a task unbecoming of a king. It is, however, not too late. Turn back and live a life of comfort. Pay heed to this story of musician Gandharva.”

The Vetala began the narration: In the village of Chandanpur lived two prosperous men, Kubera and Suchela. They owned magnificent mansions, with large courtyards and gardens. Each possessed vast tracts of fertile land. More than everything else, they were both good natured and kind. However, they differed in their manner and behaviour.

While Kubera was extremely business minded, Suchela was a patron of the arts. He would invite artistes who visited Chandanpur to his home. Before they went away, he would also shower them with gifts. Although Kubera did not shy away from doing the same, he would do so only if asked.

There was a musician named Gandharva in Gangapur who had discovered that in Chandanpur was his original ancestral village, although his forefathers had migrated and settled down in Gangapur.

No one knew what Gandharva’s real name was. Many years earlier a king had, in appreciation of his talent, named him thus. He had gone and sung at many towns and villages. He was now keen to visit his ancestral village in Chandanpur and give a recital.

He, however, faced a dilemma. Over the years, he had become used to a life of comfort and luxury. Every

day he would bathe in rosewater in a pond specially dug for him. For his food, he would have new recipes to tickle his palate. As he could not bear heat, he would stay in rooms with chicks on the windows constantly sprinkled with cool water.

Therefore, Gandharva performed only for people who could afford to provide such luxuries. Now that he had decided to visit Chandanpur, he sent his servant Pulinda to find out if there were rich persons who would be ready to look after his needs.

In Chandanpur, Pulinda was told about Kubera and Suchela. He went to Kubera first and told him about Gandharva's requirements.

Kubera said, "My house has all such facilities and luxuries and I don't mind Gandharva staying with me. But I'm not an admirer of music nor of any other art. So I won't be able to spend any time with him nor shall I attend any of his concerts. I would suggest your meeting Suchela."

Pulinda then went to meet Suchela. He was overjoyed. "It's an honour to the village and my extreme good fortune to have such a famous singer visiting us. I shall get a pond dug for him and arrange for the best cooks and dancers for his pleasure. And I shall be at hand as long as he stays here."



Pulinda returned and explained to his master whatever he had learnt. Gandharva was pleased, too, and he sent word to Suchela to await his arrival in Chandanpur in a month's time.

As Gandharva prepared for his journey to Chandanpur, he was summoned by the King of Gangapur. The Queen Mother had taken ill and wished that Gandharva sang for her.

So Gandharva postponed his visit to Chandanpur, and went to perform for the Queen Mother. She was overjoyed. "No medicine has provided me with such peace of mind. Please sing for me every day for a month."

Gandharva could not refuse the



wishes of the Queen Mother. So he sent word that he would be able to visit Chandanpur only after a month.

A week later, the Royal physician approached Gandharva and said, “Your music is indeed rapturous. I have not been able to cure the Queen Mother. So please continue to sing for a month. After that I shall give you a seed. Take it to the forest. Two soldiers will take care of you. Sow the seed while singing. And water it while singing every day for six months. By then it will bloom. Bring me the first flower and I shall use it for making a potion that will cure the Queen Mother of her illness completely. However, you will have to pay heed to one condition. You will ensure that your

surroundings are clean and not polluted. That is why you have to be in the forests. Also you should not eat any cooked food. You must eat only roots, berries, and fruits, and drink milk and water during all the six months.”

Although the request was made by the Royal physician, Gandharva knew that it was undoubtedly the king’s wishes. He felt honoured that his music could save the Queen Mother’s life. He called Pulinda and asked him to go to Suchela and explain the latest situation.

Meanwhile, after making all the preparations, Suchela was eagerly awaiting Gandharva’s visit. According to Vastu Shastra, it was impossible for Suchela to maintain the pond for more than two months. Therefore, he had it filled up as soon as he heard the news from Pulinda. He also paid the cooks and dancers twice their wages and sent them away.

He then told Pulinda, “I’m not bothered that all the preparations I made have been wasted. However, if you come and tell me ten days in advance, I shall make all the arrangements once again. I’ll most eagerly await news of your master’s arrival.”

Gandharva was very pleased and pleasantly surprised. He decided he would visit Chandanpur even if it

was only to enjoy Suchela's hospitality. He then left for the forest.

Gandharva spent the next six months in the forest and did exactly as directed by the Royal physician. He felt all discomforts for the first few days, but he soon got accustomed to his new environs. In fact, every day a new *raaga* rose in his lips and his voice became more mellifluous.

When the first flower had blossomed, he took it to the capital. The potion made from the flower cured the Queen Mother of her affliction, much to everyone's joy and amazement.

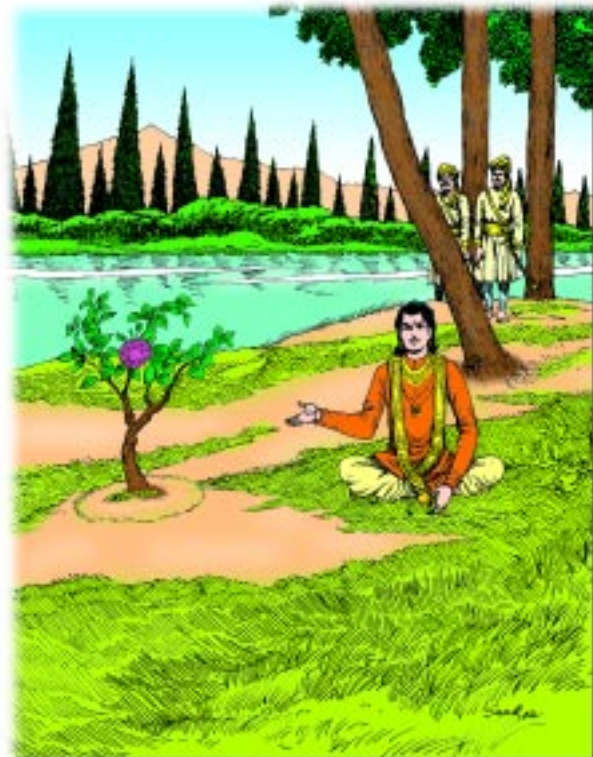
The news of Gandharva and his 'Melody Flower' reached the ears of the ruler of neighbouring Viswapuri. He requested the King of Gangapur to allow the singer to visit his kingdom. Gandharva then left for Viswapuri. Before leaving, Gandharva told Pulinda not to inform Suchela about his trip to Viswapuri.

The King of Viswapuri was spell-bound by Gandharva's voice. He had never experienced such a state of blissful peace. He very much wished to keep Gandharva in his palace. But he feared the King of Gangapur might not agree to let him go. He consulted his own physician.

He said, "Your majesty, for many years now, you've been seeking such

peace of mind. Where my medicines failed, Gandharva's music has succeeded. True, there's something very special about his voice. It could possibly be its novelty. Once the novelty wears out, you might lose this peace that you have discovered. One of the ancient texts refers to the 'Melody Flower'. Just as the King of Gangapur obtained this flower for his mother, you should also obtain it and get cured of your worry and anxiety."

At the request of the King of Viswapuri, Gandharva spent another six months in the forests. He collected the Melody Flower, gave it to the king, and returned home to his life of luxury.



One day Pulinda reminded him of his promise to visit Chandanpur. Immediately Gandharva said, "Inform Kubera that I'm visiting Chandanpur and that I shall stay with him as his guest."

The Vetala now turned to King Vikramaditya and said, "O King, Gandharva's decision indicates that he was confused. Suchela had for a long time dutifully awaited his visit. Doesn't it seem odd that he forsook Suchela's hospitality and decided to stay with Kubera? Doesn't he appear to have lost his mind? Having lived an austere life in the forests, Gandharva indulged himself after returning to the town. Isn't it possible that he now believed he could adapt to any sort of life? I'm sure that you know the answers to my doubts, but if you remain silent, your head shall explode into smithereens."

Vikramaditya had the answers ready: "Without external pressures and compulsions, when a human being willingly changes himself, the fact that

he rejoices in the novelty of a change is very true. However, what guided Gandharva's 'strange' decision is the Melody Flower. It was enough excuse for him to postpone his visit to Chandanpur twice. And he was not certain if a visit wouldn't be postponed again. Gandharva wisely knew that journeys are always uncertain and indefinite. He had begun to like Suchela, but did not want to trouble him. Gandharva could guess that as soon as Suchela heard of his visit, he would again start preparations and would suffer heavy losses in the event of another postponement. He, therefore, decided to become Kubera's guest as he would not waste any effort preparing for his visit. Neither was Gandharva mentally unsound nor was his decision in any way strange."

Having successfully broken Vikramaditya's vow of silence, the Vetala disappeared along with the corpse and flew back to the ancient tree.



Festivals of India

Rejoicing a royal return

Festival time in god's own country! It's Onam in Kerala. The very mention of Onam creates visions of colourful floral patterns arranged in the courtyards of houses and the famous snake-boats

that race on the palm-fringed waters of Kerala.

Celebrated soon after the monsoon comes to an end when the land is fresh and green, Onam is one of the two important festivals

of Kerala, the other being Vishu in April. The harvesting is over and the granaries are full. The time is just perfect for relaxing and rejoicing; the mood just right for a long celebration!

Onam is celebrated in the month of *Chingom* (August-September), the first month of the Kerala new year. It is observed when the *Shraavana* star occurs in the North Indian *Shravan* or *Bhadrapada* months. Onam is celebrated for at least a week in all the households, irrespective of caste or creed. In some communities, it is a 10-day long festival, from *Hastha* (Attam) to *Shraavana* (Thiru-Onam).

Onam has been an important festival of Kerala for more than a thousand years now. A copper plate inscription dated A.D. 861 records the celebration of Onam.



Mahabali's Homecoming

Long ago, an *asura* king called Mahabali ruled the land of Kerala. He was a wise, just, and able king, loved by his subjects. People lived in peace and prosperity during his reign. He was also a powerful king and ruled over not only the earth but the heavens and the nether world.

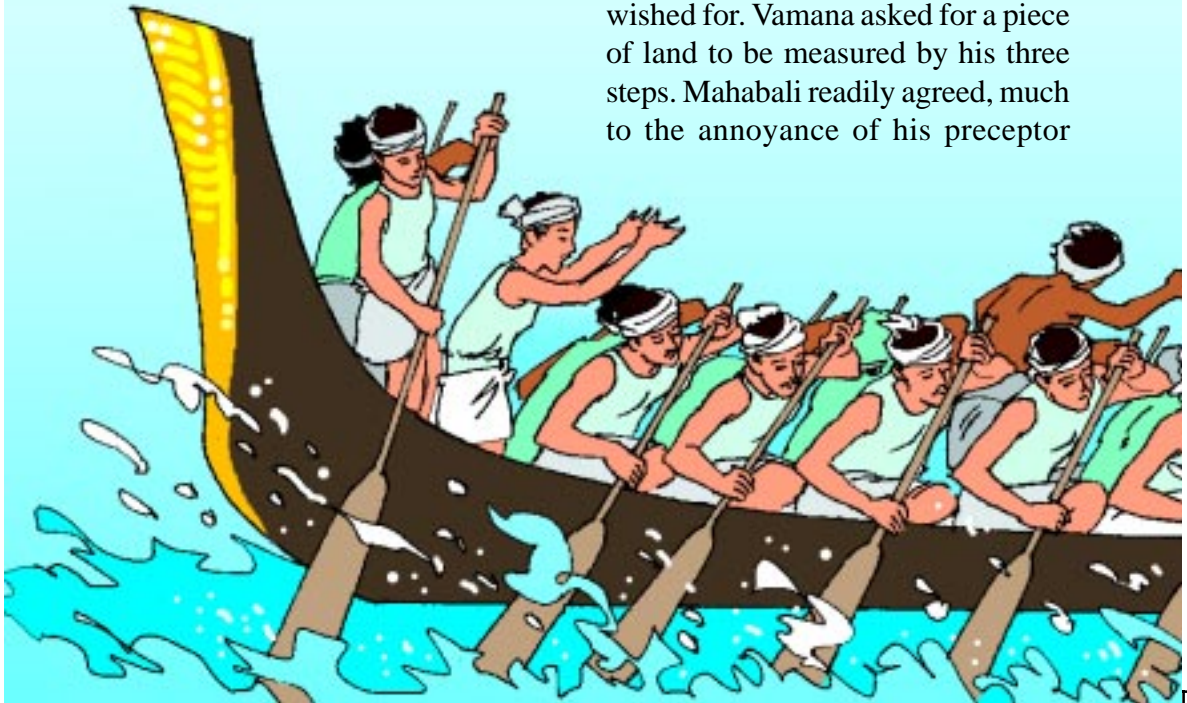
His fame and glory was too much for the devas of the heaven to bear. He incurred their displeasure and wrath. They decided to punish Mahabali for



taking over the heavens and sought the help of Lord Vishnu.

Vishnu waited for an opportune moment. Soon Mahabali made arrangements for a grand *Aswamedha yaga*. Now, taking the guise of a young brahmin boy, Vamana, Vishnu headed straight to the venue of the *yaga*. It was customary for kings performing *yagas* to grant

anything asked for by the visiting brahmins. And Mahabali followed convention by enquiring what Vamana wished for. Vamana asked for a piece of land to be measured by his three steps. Mahabali readily agreed, much to the annoyance of his preceptor



Sukracharya. He did not find anything amiss in granting what this young and noble brahmin had asked for. It was then that the unexpected happened.

Vamana suddenly grew in size till his feet were big enough to measure the earth and the heavens in two steps. He then asked Mahabali for the land to be measured by the third step. The humbled *asura* king, true to his promise, bowed his head. Vamana placed his foot on Mahabali's head and pushed him deep into the nether world. But before Vamana disappeared, the king asked for a boon. He wanted to visit his kingdom once a year to see his subjects.

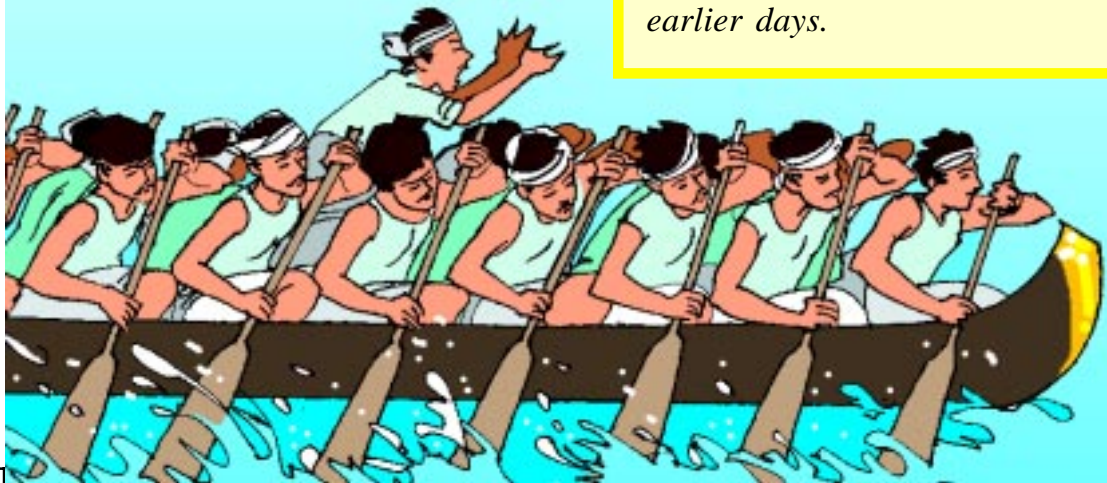
It is this homecoming of Mahabali to earth that is celebrated as Onam.

People believe that their beloved king visits all homes on any one of the ten days of Onam to see how happy



they are. So they put up a grand show to welcome Mahabali. Just before Onam, all houses are cleaned and tastefully decorated. In the early mornings of the festival days, women and children go about gathering flowers of all hues, and leaves and arrange them in attractive patterns on the threshold of their homes. These beautiful floral patterns are called *pookkalams*. The

These days Vamana, who banished the king from his own kingdom, is worshipped along with Mahabali. Square-shaped earthen mounds representing Mahabali and Vishnu are put up in the courtyards and decorated with flowers. This worship of Vamana was not prevalent in the earlier days.





people wear new clothes, give gifts, and sing ballads in praise of their great king.

A lip-smacking array of traditional food is prepared during the ten day long feasting. The women perform *kaikottikkali*, a traditional folk dance associated with Onam.

The boat races that take place on the palm-fringed waters of Kerala are the most exciting events of all. The wooden boats are long and in the shape of a snake with a raised hood. These huge snake-boats propelled by a hundred odd men swarm the backwaters of Kerala on the day of the race. Apart from these huge

boats, several small canoes, some managed by even small children, throng the waters. On the whole, the entire mood is one of fun and frolic.

Match-Making!

Match the following words related with Onam with their exact meaning

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Kaikottikkali</i> | a) new clothes worn on Onam day |
| 2. <i>Onakkodi</i> | b) boat race |
| 3. <i>Pookkalam</i> | c) feast on Onam day |
| 4. <i>Vallamkali</i> | d) a folk dance |
| 5. <i>Onassadya</i> | e) patterns done with flowers on the ground |

Answers: 1-d, 2-a, 3-e, 4-b, 5-c

Saga of India

Glimpses of a great civilisation –
its glorious quest for Truth through the ages

20. When the king's left eye wept



“Grandpa, did you hear of the Yajna that is being organized in front of the temple on the river-bank? Some holy men are going to perform it, and several wealthy persons of our town have made donations to meet the expenses,” said Sandip. He seemed quite excited.

“Is that so?” was Professor Devnath’s response. He folded his newspaper at the grandson’s advent, but showed no curiosity about the impending event. Sandip was surprised, but he did not show it. “Grandpa, they say, the Yajna will ensure peace. Are they right?” he asked.

“I don’t know, my child, for peace is a quality to be cultivated within us, not externally. If those who are performing the Yajna have peace in their minds and hearts, the ritual may have some effect on others.”

“Do you mean to say the rituals are useless, otherwise?”

“Almost. Well, if the priests who are reciting the hymns are doing their job with sincerity and devotion, if the atmosphere is clean and serene, it should influence the minds of those who are participating in it or are witnessing it. Even the fragrance of flowers, incense, and so many other



Divine . By the way, the term Yajna, in the absence of any other suitable word, is translated into English as Sacrifice. It is a sacrifice in a very special sense. One makes a sacrifice of one's desires. That is the meaning of sacrifice in its highest spiritual sense. But one also submits one's desires to the gods as prayers in a different kind of Yajna. Today they are praying for peace. In olden days they wished for a son or a certain position of glory. In any case, the Yajna linked a human being with some higher powers."

"So, there seems to be different kinds of Yajnas. Right, grandpa?" asked Chameli.

items used on the occasion have their effect on the mind — and if some people have faith in the ceremony, that will also make it meaningful to some extent," replied Grandpa.

"But haven't we read of so many Yajnas being performed so often in ancient times? Were they nothing more than rituals?" The query came from Jayashree, Sandip's mother, who had entered the room with a cup of tea.

The professor straightened up and took the tea cup from her with a smile. "My daughter," he said, "the concept of Yajna went through several changes in course of time. Originally, Yajna meant an aspiration to be united with the Divine. It was a sacrifice of one's ego, an offering of one's will and action to the

"The fire rite is the external symbol of Yajna. Like the flames always rising upward, our aspirations also are expected to rise upward. Like the fire burning away the impurities in a metal and purifying it, the Yajna is also expected to burn away the impurities of our consciousness and purify it," explained the professor. "The true Yajna can always continue within oneself—as long as one continues to offer everything to the Divine. In social life also, there are unforgettable examples of a noble person sacrificing whatever he possesses to someone else, in a certain circumstance. I remember having told you the story of King Harishchandra. I'm sure, you



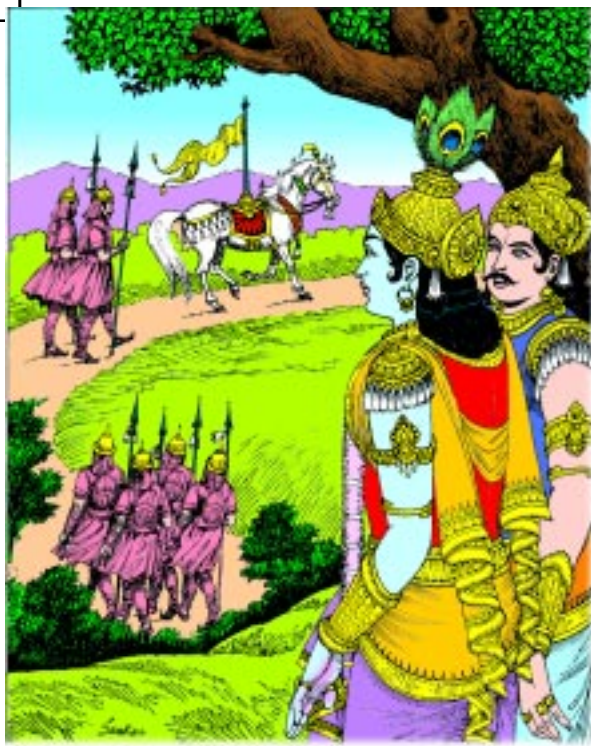
know the story of Prince Karna, who did not mind giving away the talisman and the magic shield which protected him because he had promised to fulfil his guest's wish. There is also another story about his philanthropic nature. Once when he was eating in the company of his guests, a mendicant appeared at the door and appealed to him for a handsome donation to meet the expenses of his daughter's wedding. Since Karna was using his right hand for eating, he removed his costly necklace with his left hand and gave it to his servant asking him to give it to the mendicant. One of his guests asked him: "Don't you know that alms or gifts are to be given only by the right

hand? Shouldn't you have waited till you finished eating and then given the necklace away?"

Replied Karna: "My friend, who knows if my mind would not have changed had I waited that long? A noble inspiration for an act of welfare must be followed up immediately, whereas any impulse to cause harm to somebody must be reconsidered calmly."

"Were there such compassionate people, really?" asked Sandip.

"Noble, courageous, and compassionate people were always there and they are still there. In fact, all these qualities are there in you, I, and all the people we know. Literature and



legends of the past remind us of them in order to awaken such qualities in us. We have the example of King Mayurdhwaja.” The professor then narrated the story:

Mayurdhwaja ruled over a kingdom named Ratnanagar when Yudhishtira was the King of Hastinapur. It so happened that both the kings were advised by their well-wishers to perform the Rajasuya Yajna. If one could perform Rajasuya, one would be considered the king of kings. But in order to be eligible to perform it, a king must allow a carefully chosen horse to wander through the kingdoms around his own land, escorted by some able warriors. If the horse was not stopped by any of the kings through whose territories it

moved, it was taken as if the kings accepted the suzerainty of its master.

King Yudhishtira’s horse was followed by none other than Krishna and Arjuna. On the way, they learnt that Mayurdhwaja’s horse, accompanied by the king’s son Suchitra, was coming from the opposite direction. They decided to check its march, for, to allow it the passage would amount to accepting Mayurdhwaja as the king of kings!

But something unexpected happened. They simply felt dazed when Mayurdhwaja’s horse passed by them. They could neither act nor speak!

Some wise men informed them that King Mayurdhwaja was an extraordinary man. He had no greed for anything. He granted whatever a supplicant wished to have from him at an auspicious moment.

Krishna and Arjuna were curious. They disguised themselves as travellers, and approached the king at an auspicious moment.

“O noble monarch,” said Krishna, “while we were passing through the forest, we came face to face with a terrible lion. It took hold of my son and threw him into a cave in order to eat him at leisure. We pleaded with the beast to release him and eat one of us. But it says that it will oblige us only if it got in exchange a highly pious person. If we cannot find a pious

person who would sacrifice himself for our son, even half of the body of the most pious person would suffice. According to the lion, you are the most pious person. Now, O king, would you agree to sacrifice one half of you for the sake of my son?"

Before the king had spoken, the queen who overheard the unusual request came out to the open and said, "The wife is called Ardhangini or one half of her husband. Take me to the lion. Let it devour me and set your son free."

"O compassionate queen, the wife is considered the left half of the husband, whereas the lion demands the right half of the king," Krishna said politely.

King Mayurdhwaja stood up. "Why delay? The lion, if hungry, may lose patience and harm your son. Here's the sword. Please cut me into two and carry the right half of my body for the lion."

Krishna took the sword and pretended to get ready for action. But

on observing a drop of tear in the king's left eye, he asked, "You're evidently sad at having to part with half your body. Otherwise, why should you weep? As you know, a gift given unhappily ought not to be accepted!"

"My friend, don't you observe that the tear is only in my left eye? My left eye weeps because the left half of my body cannot be as useful as the right half," explained the king.

At once Krishna and Arjuna revealed themselves to Mayurdhwaja. They attended the Yajna performed by him and thereafter Mayurdhwaja accompanied them to attend the Yajna performed by King Yudhishtira.

"Amazing!" commented Jayashree.

"Amazing, indeed, was the faith of our ancients in the capacity of man. That is the important lesson we learn from such legends. We understand the spirit of our heritage better," said the professor.

-Visvvasu



Divine dance



Who isn't mesmerised by the coordinated footsteps and the graceful yet vibrant postures of Bharatanatyam? After all, it was Lord Brahma himself who created the dance form.

It is said, the devas and the gundharvas once went to Brahma with a request: create a fifth Veda, one so beautiful that it would appeal to everyone's senses. And so he created the *Natya Veda* by putting together elements from all the four existing Vedas. He took *pathya* (words) from the Rig Veda, *abhinaya* (gesture) from the Yajur Veda, *sangeeta* (music and chanting) from the Sama Veda, and *rasa* (sentiment and emotional

element) from the Atharva Veda.

He then handed it over to Bharata Muni to be taught to mankind. With the help of this Veda, the sage wrote the *Natyashastra*, an elaborate work on the techniques of Indian drama, dance, and music. Perhaps the dance derived its name from the sage.

Bharatanatyam is one of the oldest classical dance forms of India. There are elaborate dance postures sculpted in the temples of Tamil Nadu. The Tamil literary works of the Sangam



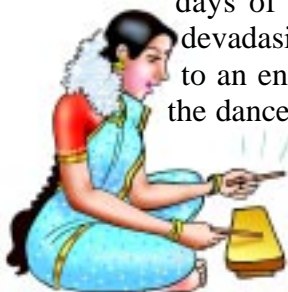
period, *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai*, make mention of this dance form.

According to the Hindu mythology, Lord Siva is the supreme lord of dance. He and his consort Goddess Parvati are believed to have performed this divine art form. The dance performed by Lord Siva is vigorous and brisk and is known as *tandava*. The *tandava* performed with joy is called *Ananda Tandava* and the one performed in an aggressive mood is called *Rudra Tandava*. The dance performed by Goddess Parvati is gentle and graceful and is known as *Lasya*.

The songs used in the performances of Bharatanatyam have their origins in the Hindu mythology, literature, and religion. The singer is accompanied by artistes on the *mridangam* and the *violin*, and the *nattuvanan*, who conducts the recital.

In olden days Bharatanatyam was performed mostly by *devadasis* or temple dancers, and *rajanartakis* who performed at the royal courts. The Tamil kings were great patrons of music and dance.

Unfortunately, this dance form suffered a terrible setback in the early days of the 20th century. The devadasi tradition was brought to an end by law. Fortunately, the dance style did not die with that. Several devoted artistes and like-



- ❖ Have you noticed that *Bharatanatyam* consists of the first syllables of the words ***bhava*** - expression, ***raga*** - melody, ***tala*** - rhythm, and ***natyam*** - dance?
- ❖ The first public performance of an up and coming dancer is very significant. It is called *Arangetram* in Tamil and *Rangapravesha* in Kannada.
- ❖ The arangetram is preceded by anklet worship, known as *salangai puja* in Tamil and *gejjepooje* in Kannada. In olden days, students were not allowed to wear anklets until their first public performance.

minded people revived Bharatanatyam in the post-Independence era. E. Krishna Iyer, Balasaraswathi, Rukmini Devi Arundale, Kalanidhi, and Shanta Rao are just a few of them.

A Folk Tale from Bengal

The state of West Bengal is bordered by three countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. It is located between 21° and 27° North Latitude at the head of the Bay of Bengal and 86° and 89° East Longitude, with the Tropic of Cancer running through it.

West Bengal is one of the nine coastal states of India, but it is the only state that shows a wide variety of topography, climate, and habitats. Its range includes the coastal plains to the freezing Himalayan peaks. It has the largest mangrove forest in the country and some of the highest mountain ranges in the world. Bengal is also the gateway to the seven northeastern states. It has an area of 88,752 sq km, with a population of 80,221,171.

The mangrove forests of Sundarbans in West Bengal are the home of the magnificent Royal Bengal Tiger. The Sundarbans has been declared a National Park and Tiger Reserve by the Central Government under the Project Tiger scheme.

Brahmin versus Bidhata

Once upon a time, in a little village in Bengal called Sonarpara, there lived a Brahmin. He had a peculiar fate. He could never eat his fill at any feast on any occasion. Something would invariably happen to interrupt his meal. He bemoaned his luck, but whether he ate fast or he ate slowly, he found he could not cheat his fate. That was



fate, had written for him, and that is what happened every time.

Once he was invited to take part in a festival at the local Maharaja's palace and stay for the feast. As you could imagine, he was very pleased. He told his wife: "This time I feel I'll be able to eat my fill. Please get my clothes washed so that I'll look presentable at the palace."

So, wearing freshly laundered and crisply starched *dhoti-kurta*, the Brahmin set off for the palace. He went past the lush green paddy fields and the rolling meadows, admiring the beautiful *kash phool* nodding their heads in the breeze.

When he reached the palace, he was welcomed cordially. He sat down for his meal and the servants placed a silver plate for him and served him most respectfully and hospitably. The Brahmin looked at the plate in front of him and his eyes popped out: there was *maccher jhol*, of course, and there was *alu postho* and *begun bhaja*, apart from the most divine rice, dripping with ghee, and there was *jalpai chutney* and, of course, *mishti doi* and twenty varieties of simply divine sweets. And there were many other dishes, too.

Everything was going well and the Brahmin was really enjoying his meal when the rope basket in which a mud pot of curd was hung up from the

Chandamama

37

Arts and crafts

West Bengal is known for a variety of arts and handicrafts. The handloom material spun here is very popular all



over India. The villages of Tangail, Dhanekali are known for their

handlooms, while Murshidabad is known for its fine silk looms.

Bankura and Bishnupur are known for their terracotta toys and handicrafts. There are ancient terracotta temples in the town of Bishnupur. The town is also known for conch shell carving, jewellery, tussar silk, and Baluchari saris.

Kumartuli is famous all over the world for its sculptors. It is here that huge and beautiful images of Goddess Durga and other gods and goddesses are created for worship all over the state during Durga Puja. It is said that the sculptors of this town have created idols for Bengali communities all over India and even abroad.

The Purulia Chhau, a martial art form, is popular in the district of Purulia. The popularity of this dance form has brought fame to the Chhau masks and clay models made here.





ceiling suddenly broke. The mud pot came crashing down and fell near the Brahmin's plate. Shards from the pot fell onto his plate, and the Brahmin had to get up, with his meal unfinished yet again.

As he took his leave, the Maharaja asked him solicitously: "I hope the servants served you properly and everything was to your liking, *thakurmoshai* . Did you eat your fill?"

The Brahmin said: "Alas! That I was not able to do, but no one is to be blamed for what happened, except my own fate." And he told him all about his fate.

The Maharaja was quite upset. He said: "*Thakurmoshai*, please stay the night here in my humble abode.

Festivals and fairs

Dussehra is celebrated as Durga Puja in Bengal. It is the most important festival and is celebrated as the victory of Goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura. This festival mostly occurs during October-November.

Makara Sankranti in January is celebrated with the *Ganga Sagar Mela* at Sagardwip. The Bengalis have their New Year's day in April. The celestial architect, Viswakarma, is worshipped during the *Viswakarma Puja* in factories and industries in September, and a highlight of this festival is the tradition of flying kites.

Diwali is observed as *Shyama* or *Kali Puja*.



Tomorrow I'll serve you myself so that you can eat your fill." The Brahmin agreed.

The next day, a fresh feast was cooked. The Maharaja, who was a good cook, made some of the dishes himself. Then when everything was ready, the Brahmin sat down to eat.

There was nothing in the room that could break, fall, or in any way interrupt the Brahmin's feast. Now the Bidhata was really stuck. He could not find any way to stop the Brahmin from completing his meal. So, he took the form of a small golden frog and jumped onto the Brahmin's rice. The Brahmin was so absorbed in enjoying his meal that he did not notice the frog and swallowed it along with a handful of rice. Finally, the Brahmin got up having eaten his fill and happily topped it with the richest, most fragrant and spicy *mishti paan* he had ever tasted. He went back home with many gifts from the pleased Maharaja.

As he was walking to his village through the Maharaja's fields, he heard a voice say: "Ogo Brahmin, please let me out. Brahmin, please let me out." He looked here and there to see who was calling out in such distress but could see no one, so he walked on.

Again he heard: "Brahmin, let me go."

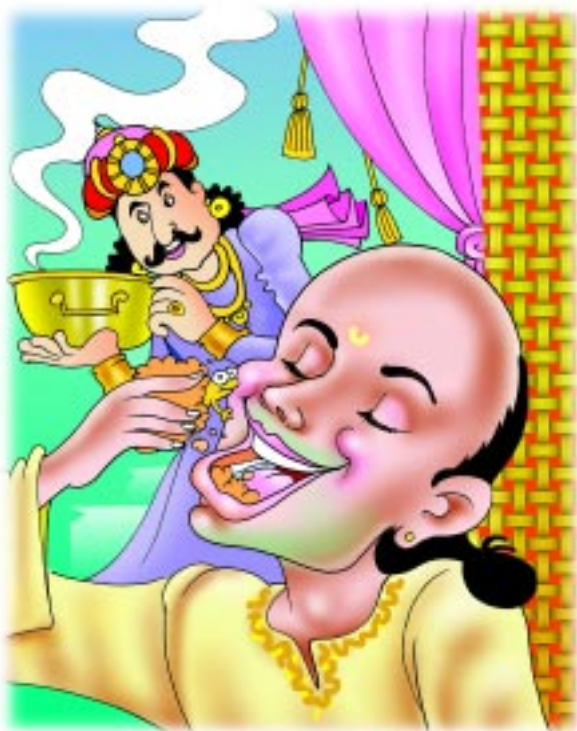
"Ke tumi? Who're you?" he asked.

"I'm Bidhata," the answer came in a frantic voice.

"Where are you?" asked the Brahmin next.

"I'm inside your stomach. I jumped into your rice in the form of a golden frog, but you did not notice and swallowed me along with the rice," said Bidhata Purush.

"Ah," said the Brahmin. "I was wondering how I completed a meal without something interrupting me. It's a good thing that I swallowed you. You cannot bother me any longer. I have you where I want you. I won't let you go now. I'd rather close up my throat. *Besh karechi!*"





Then the Brahmin walked on with his mouth shut and quite determined not to let the Bidhata out, no matter how much he yelled and screamed.

In the meantime, there was total chaos in the three worlds, for it was the Bidhata's job to regulate matters in the universe. Without him, matters could not go on. It was worse than the total collapse of the Internet or a huge war. No one knew what to do, where to go, and what should cause what. To find a solution to the crisis, the gods had a general meeting where everyone was present. After a lot of discussion they asked Lakshmi, the goddess of Wealth and Fortune, to go to the Brahmin and ask him to release the Bidhata.

Lakshmi tucked her owl under her arm and went down to the Earth quite reluctantly. The Brahmin was rather surprised to see her. Anyway he stood up, offered her a seat, and respectfully did a *pranam*.

"What can I do for you, *ma lokki*?" he asked.

"You've got the Bidhata imprisoned. Please let him go. Without him, the business of the universe can't go on," she explained.

When he heard this, the Brahmin lost his temper.

"Get my big stick," he told his wife. "I'll show this goddess what is what. All my life she has turned her face away from me, and now that I've some good luck, she wants me to let go of that rascal Bidhata. I'll give her the kind of beating she has never seen before."

Lakshmi got really alarmed. Nobody had ever spoken to her that way before. She fled from there and went back to the gods and told them what had happened.

Next, the gods persuaded the goddess of Learning, Saraswati, to go to the Brahmin and get the Bidhata released.

When the Brahmin saw the goddess of Learning, he got up even more respectfully and bowed

before her. “What can I do for you, *debi*?” he asked.

When she made her request, the Brahmin lost his temper once again. He shouted again for his stick. “I’ll show this goddess,” he yelled. “Since the days of my schooling, she has shunned me and given me no knowledge or learning, and now she wants me to give up the Bidhata when I have him secure where he can’t harm me. Give me that stick, and I’ll teach her a proper lesson.”

Poor Saraswati, she also fled the place in alarm.

This time Lord Siva himself came down to the Brahmin. The Brahmin was a devout follower of Siva and so he welcomed him with ceremony and worshipped him and then respectfully asked him what he could do.

Siva asked him to release the Bidhata.

“My Lord,” said the Brahmin. “You’ve asked me, and so I must do as you say. But what is the solution to *my* problem? I’ve had such a miserable

life and the Bidhata is at the bottom of it all.”

Then Lord Siva said, “Don’t worry about that. I’ll take you to heaven with me, and you’ll be free of the Bidhata’s machinations.”

So the Brahmin opened his mouth and let the Bidhata out. Then Siva took the Brahmin and his wife, body and soul, to heaven with him.

Chandamama

41

Glossary

Dhoti-kurta: the traditional dress of the Bengali men are cotton dhotis and long-sleeved cotton kurtas.

Kash phool: a beautiful blue flower that grows in abundance in Bengal.

Maccher jhol: a traditional dish of fish

Alu postho: a dish of potatoes cooked with a paste of poppy seeds

Begun bhaja: a dish of eggplants

Jalpai chutney: a sweet and sour chutney served with meals

Mishti doi: sweet curds

Thakurmoshai: a mode of addressing elderly people with respect

Mishti paan: a variety of sweet-tasting betel leaves packed with spices, taken as a digestive after heavy meals

Ogo: the Bengali way of addressing younger ones, a term of endearment

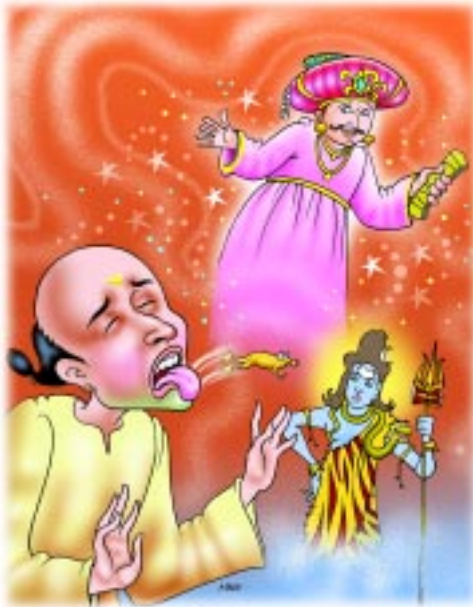
Ke Tumi: Who are you?

Besh Karechi: I’ve done the right thing!

Pranam: the traditional form of greeting one another with folded hands

Ma Lokki: Goddess Lakshmi is called Lokki by Bengalis

Debi: the Bengali way of saying devi or goddess



Men of Wit - Birbal



Emperor Akbar sat on the throne and looked around. He was in a mood to ask riddles. "Which is the best flower in the world?" The courtiers looked at each other.

One of them thought he had the answer. He went near Akbar, and opened a tiny attar bottle, and smeared a drop on the back of his palm. "You mean to say rose?" the emperor queried. The courtier put out a broad smile.



As no comment came from the emperor, another courtier stood up, and put out his hand. There was a string of jasmine flowers on his wrist. "Jasmine, without doubt, your majesty."

Akbar did not appear convinced. A third courtier pointed at the lotus motif engraved on the pillars. "Sire, the pillars have the lotus motif. Perhaps it's your favourite..." Akbar raised his hand. The courtier fell silent.





As the emperor again looked around, another courtier stood up. He had noticed the tall flower vases on either side of the throne. “The blue lilies in the vases, your majesty! Aren’t they from the royal pool?”

“The flowers may have bright colours, they may smell sweet, they may look magnificent in a vase or on a pillar, but...but..” the emperor did not complete the sentence. He looked around once again. “Where’s Birbal?”



“Here I am, sire!” said Birbal, as he got up from his seat. “The best flower is the one which we put to good use.” The courtiers thought, the answer was more puzzling than the emperor’s question!



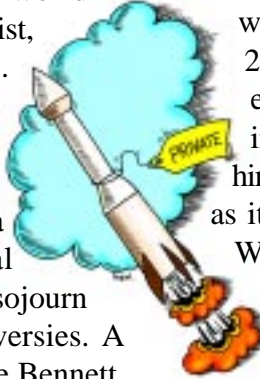
“Sire, the dress all of us wear come from cotton! But for the cotton flower, we would not have been wearing any dress!” said Birbal. Amidst laughter, Akbar came down the steps to reward Birbal with a pearl necklace.





Purely private

Four months ago, the world watched the first space tourist, Mr. Dennis Tito, a U.S. multi-millionaire, go up along with two Russian cosmonauts and come back to earth after spending a week in the International Space Station. His space sojourn took place amidst controversies. A British space fanatic, Steve Bennett, one time toothpaste technician, also



is planning a trip but does not want to cause any controversy. So, he is building his own spaceship called Nova, which will take off by the end of 2001. The £100,000 rocket is expected to take him 62 miles into space. Of course, he will himself pilot the 30ft long vehicle as it travels 6,400 km per hour. While the 'spaceship' gets its finishing touches, Mr. Bennet is preparing himself for the rigours of space travel.

Just for fun

A sports fan, looking for an activity that would give him a 'kick', decided to parachute down from the Eiffel Tower in Paris. When he touched the ground, he found policemen waiting to take him into custody. "But I haven't broken any laws, have I?" he pleaded. They looked at each other for a loophole in the law; there weren't any! Moreover, he hadn't broken any bones, either! They asked him, what had prompted him to undertake such a hazardous sport. "Oh! That! I did it just for fun!" he replied, with a cheek to cheek smile.



Chandamama

Pushed into a court case

One of the common pranks little mischief-makers perform is to pull the chair away as someone is about to sit on it. This incident happened in a law college in New York. The lecturer was explaining how a suit for damages can be filed and argued. He wanted to stage a demonstration. A lady student was about to take her seat, when he pulled the chair away. She got hurt and promptly sued the lecturer for \$500,000!



On the verge of extinction

We are all concerned about animals, birds, and trees already extinct or on the verge of extinction. You can add one more to this group—languages. The immediate threat is to Eyak spoken in Alaska, the largest of all U.S. states. It is spoken by only one person—Marie Smith, who is 83 years old. In the event of her death, there will not be another who will speak Eyak or who knows that language. According to the UNESCO, there are some 6,800 languages in

the world, each of them spoken by more than 2, 500 people. Nearly 90 per cent of these languages may become extinct in the next 100 years, unless there are a hundred thousand people using them. The World Watch Institute says, with the death of a language, what is lost for ever is a particular culture.

You could've left a dictionary behind, e... yak!



September 2001



Get one absolutely free!

‘Buy one, get one free’ or ‘Buy *this* and get *that* totally free’ is a very common offer in today’s world. Who hasn’t heard of it? Everything from soaps and shoes, and shirts and trousers are available with this tag. And, of course, the offer is irresistible, isn’t it? What follows is a different story, that of a little boy who got two surprise gifts – one of which came absolutely free!

Ranjith was a lazy boy and hated doing any work. He was all of fifteen years and never lifted as much as a finger to help anyone. His favourite activities were eating, sleeping, and occasionally playing some games. Much to everyone’s annoyance he had a suitable excuse to dodge any work he was asked to do. He always managed to

dumbfound everyone with his fertile mind!

When asked to help with the gardening, he used to say, “Surely, you don’t want me to hurt the earth with a spade and a hoe, do you?”

His reason for not wanting to water the plants was that he feared they would catch a cold!

When his mother asked him to clean the furniture in the house, he gave her a cheeky grin and said, “Ma, you always keep the house so clean that there is not a speck of dirt anywhere. I cannot find any furniture which needs dusting!” His mother could not find anything to say.

His parents were thrilled with his ready and clever responses to all their requests and pleas. They would watch smugly while he snapped out

a reply to put off some work. And soon Ranjith grew to think that he was always right in whatever he did.

Sometimes he had to be called in when he was spending too much of time just playing.

“Playing is good exercise, Ma. Don’t you know that it is essential for the body?” So saying he would continue to play until he was exhausted.

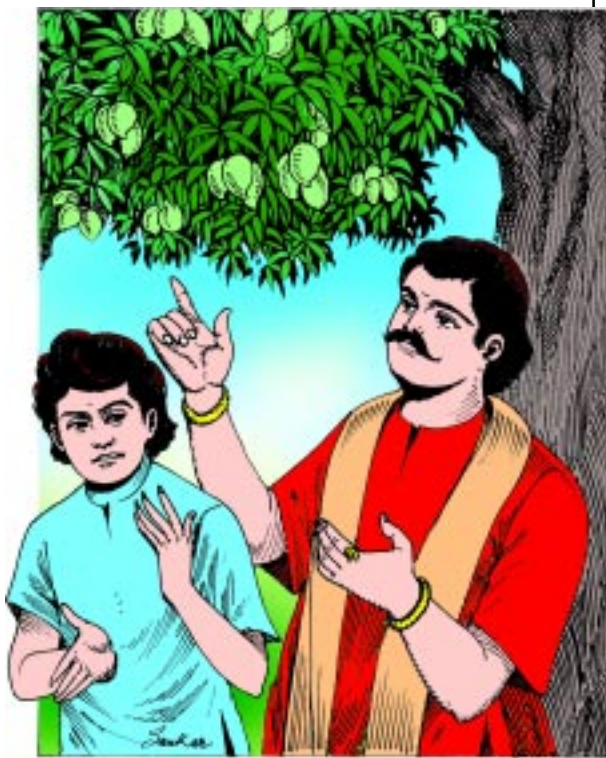
One day, his uncle Shankar came on a visit. Even on the first day he observed Ranjith’s behaviour and laziness.

‘My nephew has become such a lazy boy,’ he thought. ‘I must do something to make him change,’ Shankar decided.

He spoke about it to his sister, Ranjith’s mother. But she warded him off with a light laugh. “Yes, I know he’s lazy, but I guess he’ll grow out of it. And see how cleverly he puts off work. His intelligence will see him through life.”

But Shankar did not share her confidence. He felt strongly that intelligence apart, one needed to work hard to prove oneself in life. He knew that if a young lad could not shake off his laziness at a young age, he would never get out of it.

Chandamama



He tried to ask Ranjith to help with the picking of mangoes from the garden so that they could be sold in the market.

“If I do that work, what will the servant boy do, uncle? I want to give other people a chance to work so that they, too, can earn money,” Ranjith answered his uncle.

Shankar was undoubtedly stunned by this answer.

The next day, Uncle Shankar went out into the city and came back with a lot of news. Over the dinner table he casually mentioned to Ranjith’s parents that a lot of shops were offering something free if something else was



make Ranjith do some work; so the next day, his uncle asked him to go and buy a few things from these shops which were giving something free.

The next morning, Ranjith lay in bed for longer than he was wont. He slept and slept and slept and did not awake till it was late in the morning. His mother shook him and his father called him loudly but all to no avail. Finally, when he awoke, he groaned and moaned and tossed in bed. He had found the perfect excuse to avoid the walk to the market: a stomach ache.

purchased. He went on to give details. “The market is buzzing with activity. Whoever buys ten kilos of rice at Raja’s shop gets 250 gm of poha free! And if you buy two saris at Veer’s shop, you’ll get a dhoti free! And Som has an offer, too – any kid who buys two toys at his shop gets a third one free! Our traders are learning to be clever - like their counterparts in the city!”

Ranjith, too, was listening. “This is all a strategy of the shopkeepers to sell their goods,” he said.

“But they make up this loss by selling other goods at a high price.”

This was a good opportunity to

The whole morning he pretended to be ill. He lay in bed and complained of stomach ache, headache, and fever. Finally, uncle Shankar gave up. He knew the boy would not mend his ways. Shankar, therefore, decided to go shopping himself.

He thought he would buy those articles that carried offers of free gifts. And he would show his silly nephew how much he had gained by these purchases.

Would a servant sent out marketing really pay as much time and attention to getting home the best of bargains? Such were the

thoughts running in Shankar's mind as he trod out towards the shops.

As soon as his uncle went out to the market, Ranjit jumped out of bed and after eating something, he ran out to play.

After a while, he saw Shankar returning. He wanted to hide before his uncle saw him, so he began to run away. In his hurry, he slipped and fell, fracturing his ankle!

Uncle Shankar ran up to help him, but Ranjith wanted to get up on his own. He knew that his uncle was angry with him. In his attempt to get up, Ranjith slipped again and hurt his hand as well! Double trouble! What a mess!

“Come on, Ranjith, let me help

you up,” said uncle Shankar. “You have already hurt yourself so seriously by trying to hide from your mistake.”

Ranjith laughed in spite of his pain and replied, “Don't worry, uncle. I got only one big wound for my mistake. I got the other one absolutely free!”

At this, his uncle laughed, picked him up in his arms and took him home. “You really are a bright boy, Ranjith. But I think you've learnt your lesson, haven't you?”

That day did bring a change in Ranjith's behaviour. He gave up his lazy ways and started helping at home and even outside. He always remembered the two surprise 'gifts' he had received!



Know Your India

Quiz

September 5, marking the birth anniversary of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, well-known philosopher and academician who became India's second President, is observed as Teacher's Day. This month's quiz is devoted to Education.

1. Which place in ancient India was known as a centre of learning?
2. Who founded the Viswabharati University? When?
3. What is the name of the well-known school of dance and music and the arts in Chennai? Who was its founder?
4. When was the New Education Policy approved by the Parliament?
5. Where is the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies located?
6. Who founded the Banaras Hindu University?
7. Former President of India the late Dr. Zakir Husain was associated with a university. Which?
8. Mahatma Gandhi popularised a novel education system. What was it called?
9. Who was the Minister of Education in the first Nehru cabinet?
10. The Universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay were established in the same year. When?
11. When was English introduced as the medium of instruction?
12. A well-known educationist of India held the high office of Deputy Director-General of UNESCO. Who was it?
13. Who taught archery to the Kaurava and Pandava princes?
14. What is the name of the institution in Kerala noted for training in the dance forms of that state?
15. An ancient university had a medical college attached to it. Which?

(Answers next month)

Answers to August Quiz

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. The Third Native Cavalry | 6. April 13, 1919 |
| 2. An Englishman called A.O. Hume | 7. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak |
| 3. W. C. Bonnerjee; | 8. 1915 |
| Bombay; 1885 | 9. Jatin Mukherjee |
| 4. Lala Hardayal | 10. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar |
| 5. February 5, 1922; | 11. Bhagat Singh |
| in Gorakhpur district | 12. In Singapore; in 1943 |



16. Krishna outwits his enemies

In the Dwapara Yuga (age), the Rakshasas once again peopled the Earth in the form of men, and Bhoodevi, the spirit of the Earth, found it impossible to bear the burden of their misdeeds. She prayed to Vishnu for release from them, and the Lord reassured her that he would incarnate as Krishna and save her from all of her sorrows.

An old and powerful enemy of Vishnu, a rakshasa called Kalanemi, had taken birth as Kamsa, the King of Mathura. His father was Ugrasena and his uncle the wicked Jarasandha, the King of Viprachithi. Jarasandha oppressed and ill-treated his neighbouring kings and carried on his rule in the most lawless manner.

Ugrasena had a niece called

Devaki, who was married to Vasudeva, the king of the Yadavas. Kamsa, who was quite fond of his cousin, took the newly wedded couple in his chariot to escort them out of the city and bid farewell to Devaki as she was going home with her husband.

At that time, a voice was heard from the heavens: “Devaki’s eighth child will be the cause of the death of Kamsa!”

That was enough for Kamsa. He forgot his affection for Devaki and wanted to kill her then and there. But Vasudeva pleaded with him and promised that all of Devaki’s children would be handed to him. And keeping his word, Vasudeva did hand over six children, as soon as they were born, to Kamsa who ruthlessly killed them.

The seventh child, a boy, by the magic of Maya, and as instructed by Vishnu, was transferred to the womb of Rohini, Vasudeva's other wife at Gokula. This was the incarnation of Adishesha, the divine snake on whom Vishnu would recline while at Vaikunta. Maya herself took birth as

sleep and the gates of the prison opened by themselves. Devaki gave birth to a baby boy. Vasudeva was asked by a heavenly voice to take the baby out of the city and leave him next to Yashoda at Gokula. He was also to bring back the baby girl that Yashoda would have given birth to. She would be handed over to Kamsa.

It was a stormy night with the monsoon in full force, and river Yamuna in spate, but Vasudeva was able to do everything as instructed with divine help. When morning came, Kamsa found himself looking at a little baby girl. He laughed contemptuously, wondering how a girl could become the cause of his death. However, he did not want to take any chances, and so he prepared to smash the baby against a wall. As he prepared to do that, the baby slipped out of his hands and sailed into the sky. At once a voice from the heavens said: "O wicked man, the one who is to destroy you is still alive and safe." Kamsa went mad with anger.

the daughter of Yashoda, the wife of Gokula's headman Nanda. As the eighth birth approached, Kamsa decided not to take any risk and he imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki.

It was the month of Bhadrapada and the eighth day of the dark half of the moon's cycle. Suddenly, at midnight the guards were overcome by deep

In the meantime there was great rejoicing in Gokula at the birth of Yashoda's son, who was named Krishna. Balarama had also been born earlier to Rohini at Gokula.

Time passed. Kamsa imprisoned his father Ugrasena and declared himself King of Mathura. However, he did not forget the prediction that



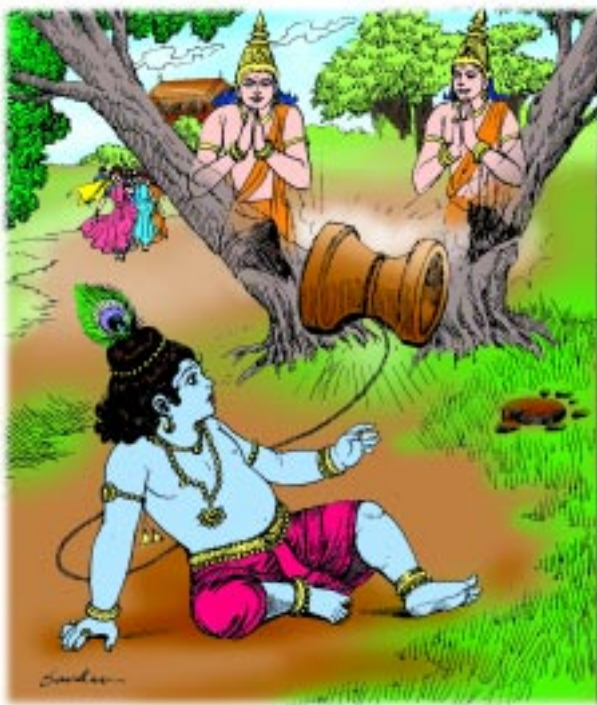
the boy who was destined to kill him was alive. So, he sent a demon in the form of a woman called Pootana to poison all the little children of the age of Krishna. When, on the pretext of suckling Krishna, she tried to poison him, he sucked the life out of her.

Yashoda brought up Krishna with great love, and Krishna grew up to be a bright and beautiful boy whose pranks the villagers affectionately spoke of. One day, Yashoda tied Krishna to a heavy millstone because she had to attend to some work and could not keep an eye on him at the same time. Krishna dragged the heavy stone out between two trees and uprooted them. The trees were actually two Gundharvas who had been cursed to take the form of trees till they were released from their curse by Krishna.

On another day, Yashoda suspected Krishna had eaten mud, and she asked him to open his mouth and show her what he had eaten. When he did open his mouth, she saw the entire cosmos with the universe spinning in his mouth and she fell down in a faint. There was a terrible snake in river Yamuna that killed and poisoned all those who came anywhere near him. Krishna danced on his hood and killed him. Krishna played the flute most sweetly and would enchant the cows whenever he took them out to graze.

He was also very popular with the girls and boys of the village and was their undisputed leader.

Hearing about Krishna and Balarama, Kamsa sent for them to take part in an archery competition. He plotted to kill them both. However, his plot failed completely and he was



killed by Krishna. Then Krishna went and freed his real parents, Devaki and Vasudeva, and re-instated his grandfather Ugrasena on the throne of Mathura.

Jarasandha's daughters had been married to Kamsa, and he now swore vengeance on Krishna. In a great battle, Krishna defeated Jarasandha



but allowed him to go free. Jarasandha continued to plot and plan Krishna's destruction with the help of several kings and kingdoms.

Jaya and Vijaya in their third birth became Sishupala and Dantavakthra. Sishupala was born to Damagoshya, the King of Chedi. He was born with four hands and three eyes. It was predicted that his extra eye and hands would disappear only when a particular person took him into his lap. However, this person would also be responsible for his death. So his mother Satvati would ask all those who came to visit them to place the child on their lap.

Krishna and Balarama came to visit Damagoshya and Satvati and, as usual, she asked Krishna to fondle the

child. At once the extra eye and hands disappeared. Satvati then begged of Krishna to tolerate up to a hundred wrongs that Sishupala might do before killing him. Krishna gave his promise. When Sishupala grew up and became king, he joined Jarasandha in tormenting Krishna.

Jarasandha continued to attack Mathura, but every time he was defeated by Krishna. Finally, Krishna decided to move his entire clan of Yadavas and all the citizens of Mathura to Dwaraka, a beautiful island-city he had asked Vishwakarma to build for him on the seacoast. He had this done secretly and so, when Jarasandha attacked and burnt Mathura, he found only an empty shell. He was very angry when he realised that he had not been able to harm Krishna in any way. He now tried to attack Dwaraka from the sea, but a terrible storm blew and all his ships sank.

About this time, Rukmini the princess of Vidarbha sent a message to Krishna. She had accepted him as her husband, but her brother Rukma had arranged for her to wed Sishupala. Rukmini requested Krishna to rescue her and take her away. Krishna did just that. As Rukmini was returning from the temple, he helped her into his chariot and drove off with her.

He was challenged by Rukma, Sishupala, and Jarasandha. Krishna defeated all the three and took Rukmini to Dwaraka with him.

Krishna still faced many enemies, but defeated all of them. The Rakshasa king Narakasura not only tormented the people on the Earth, but attacked heaven, and so Krishna along with his consort Satyabhama set out to battle him.

Narakasura was born of Bhoodevi and had a boon that only a woman from the Earth could kill him. Satyabhama was the incarnation of Bhoodevi. There was a great battle when Narakasura's entire army was destroyed. Finally, Narakasura mounted an elephant and attacked Krishna. They fought furiously. When there was a pause, Satyabhama picked up an arrow and aimed it at Narakasura. It pierced him deeply and he fell with a loud cry. Gathering all his strength, he fell upon Krishna who cut his head off with his Sudarshan chakra.

Krishna, Arjuna, and Bhima once went to Jarasandha's palace. Krishna had a purpose in going there. He felt it was time Jarasandha was dealt with. He was a very strong man and a famous wrestler. Krishna proposed a wrestling match between Bhima and Jarasandha. Bhima had already defeated and killed many strong men in wrestling bouts, including Bakasura. He was strong and an adept and Bhima soon had Jarasandha in deep trouble. Krishna had secretly told him that at the end he should tear Jarasandha's body into two and throw the two halves far away from each other. If not, the halves would come together again and it would not then be possible to kill Jarasandha. Bhima kept Krishna's instruction in mind and in the end threw the two halves of Jarasandha's body to the two corners of the hall. That was the end of Jarasandha.

Soon Krishna's valour and ability remained unquestioned.

(To continue)



By the second half of the 18th century, the English East India Company had started extending its sway, much to the chagrin of the local rulers, some of whom offered resistance. Hyder Ali of Mysore was one of them.



After the death of Hyder Ali in 1782 from cancer, his son Tipu took over the leadership. He was brave and intelligent.



The English were routed. The Commander, Brigadier Mathew was taken prisoner.



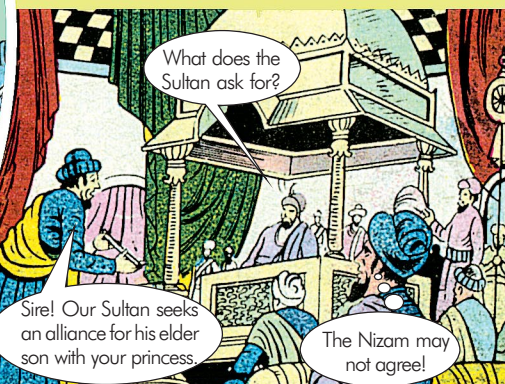
The Company signed a treaty with Tipu. There was peace for some years. But the English could not live with the humiliation meted out to them by Tipu. Governor-General Cornwallis himself led the army.



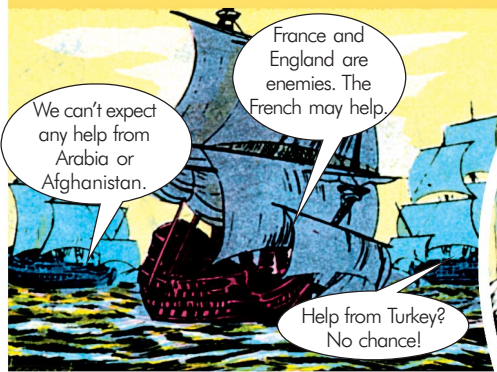
Three successive military expeditions, two led by Lord Cornwallis himself, were too much for Tipu, who surrendered. His two sons were taken hostages.



Tipu Sultan decided to seek help from his neighbours. He sent a message to the Nizam of Hyderabad.



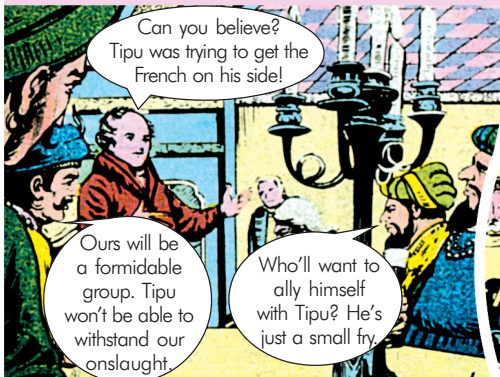
Disappointed with the Nizam, Tipu now sent emissaries to Afghanistan, Arabia, Turkey, and France.



Tipu sent a vessel to Mauritius to fetch French soldiers. But there was no garrison on that island. He realised he had been deceived.



The news that Tipu was preparing for a war reached the new Governor-General. Lord Wellesley invited the Nizam and the Marathas for talks.



Tipu's capital Srirangapatnam was attacked from three directions .



Tipu could be seen riding on the ramparts of the fort. He made a final attempt to save it.



The fort fell. The victors told Tipu he could live with a pension. But he continued his fight; however it was a losing battle. Tipu is remembered for his refusal to accept any alliance against an Indian ruler. But he fought the British all through his life. He was a man of exceptional courage.





How the Mynah changed colours!

If you were to take a quick look out of the window, the chances are you would spot a crow, a sparrow, or a mynah. Mynahs are among the common birds we see in our surroundings. The mynah is a medium-sized bird, with dark brown or slightly blackish feathers and a yellowish beak. However, it was not always so. Long, long ago, the mynah was a beautiful, fair bird with shining white feathers.

Don't you want to know how the white plumage turned a dark brown?

Mynah used to soar the skies, enjoying the bright sun and the gentle breeze. 'What more could any one want?' thought Mynah, contentedly. She was feeling as if she was on top of the world. Looking around, her eye suddenly caught something glinting in

the sun. 'Looks like gold on the cliff top,' she chirped to herself. 'I had better go and see.' So she swooped down and perched herself on the rocky cliff.

There she beheld a beautiful sight. A bird with brilliant golden feathers! She was even more surprised to see the bird sitting on a pile of gold and silver coins, and counting them out. "My name is Mynah... who are you? What are you doing, my friend?" asked Mynah breathlessly.

"I'm Goldie," the bird replied, "and can't you see I'm busy?" She continued counting her pile of coins.

Mynah's eyes got rounder and bigger, as Goldie's pile went higher and higher. 'My word! All that beautiful gold and silver... I *must* have some,' thought Mynah enviously. Alas!



keep going, and you'll enter another room filled to the brim with gold. Don't touch anything. Don't even stop there. Go straight to the Spirit of the cave, who is its owner. Kneel down before him and

It was a thought she would soon regret.

Mynah started raining questions at Goldie. "Where did you get all this money? Did you steal it from somewhere? Did you receive it as a gift from the gods?"

It dawned on Goldie that the secret was now out! Others would soon hear of this from Mynah. 'How can I keep Mynah from spreading my secret? Will she promise not to tell anyone if I share the secret with her?' She quickly decided, it was the only answer. So she said, "Will you promise that the secret will stay with you?"

When Mynah excitedly nodded her head, Goldie launched into the story. "Come here! Do you see that mountain in the far south? There's a cave hidden among the rocks there. When you enter, you'll first find a room filled with silver. Don't even look at it. Just

he'll give you everything you ask for," explained Goldie.

Mynah quickly said 'yes' and immediately flew south – towards the mysterious cave in the mountain. As she neared the mouth of the cave, she did not even slow down, but flew straight in. To her amazement, Goldie was right! The room shone bright with silver. Her eyes shining, Mynah stopped and reached out to touch it, but promptly remembered Goldie's warning and moved on. The next room shone even brighter, and Mynah could not resist the temptation to touch it. She struck her beak deep into the gold, as if to eat it.

Suddenly a loud voice boomed and



Mynah found herself face to face with the Spirit of the cave. He looked angry and fierce. Mynah felt herself shaking and shivering with fear.

“Who are you?” thundered the Spirit. “Answer me quickly!” he shouted.

Mynah was so scared that she poured out the whole story in one breath. “HMMMMM...,” said the Spirit, “it looks like you’re telling the truth. Leave the cave immediately and I’ll forgive you. But your greed needs to be punished. Go away and don’t come here again.” With this order, the Spirit brought Mynah to the entrance of the cave.

Without a backward glance, Mynah flew speedily away. ‘I should tell Goldie what happened,’ she thought shakily. “Goldie! Goldie! Where are you?” she called out. There was silence. She flew everywhere looking for her and at last spotted her on the seashore. She swooped down beside her and said, “Goldie! You’re not going to believe me when I tell you

all that had happened! The Spirit of the cave was so angry! Why didn’t you tell me? I couldn’t get what I wanted...Tell me another way of getting gold and silver like you! Come on, Goldie, why are you silent?”

Mynah waited for Goldie to say something. She noticed the sad expression on Goldie’s face. “What happened, Goldie? Tell me quickly!” she demanded.

“You were better off with whatever you had, Mynah,” said Goldie sorrowfully. “Why did you become so greedy, wanting what was mine?”

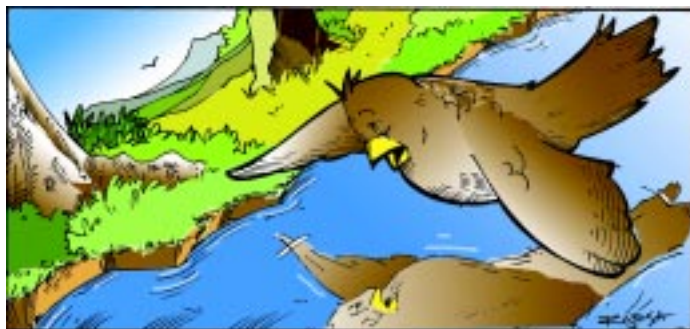
“What are you talking about?” exclaimed Mynah. “I don’t understand,” she said, flying up and down.

“Oh Mynah, Mynah, you still haven’t learnt your lesson. Just look at yourself and you will know,” said Goldie as she flew away.

Mynah flew above the water and looked down at her reflection. At first she did not recognise herself. And then she let out a loud wail. All her beautiful white feathers had turned

into a shabby dark brown. Only her beak, which she had put into the gold, was yellow.

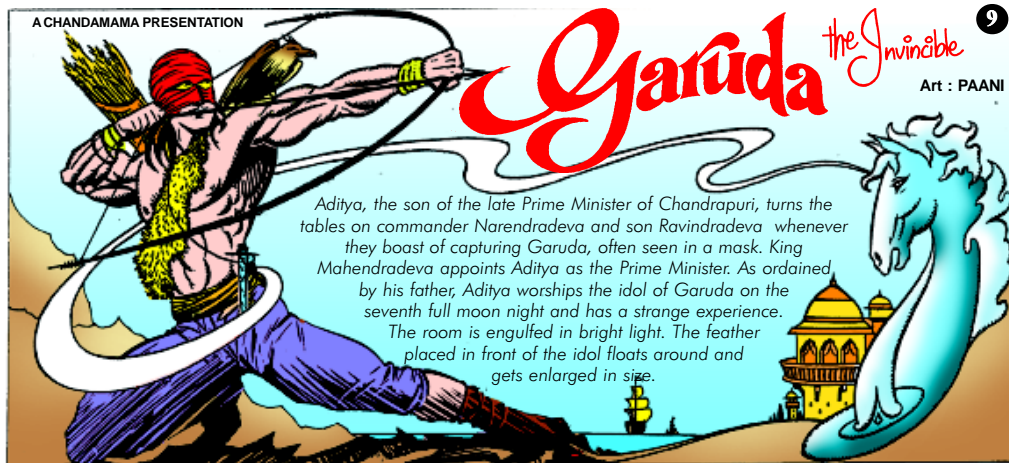
Mynah had learnt never to be greedy again. But the hard way.



Garuda the Invincible

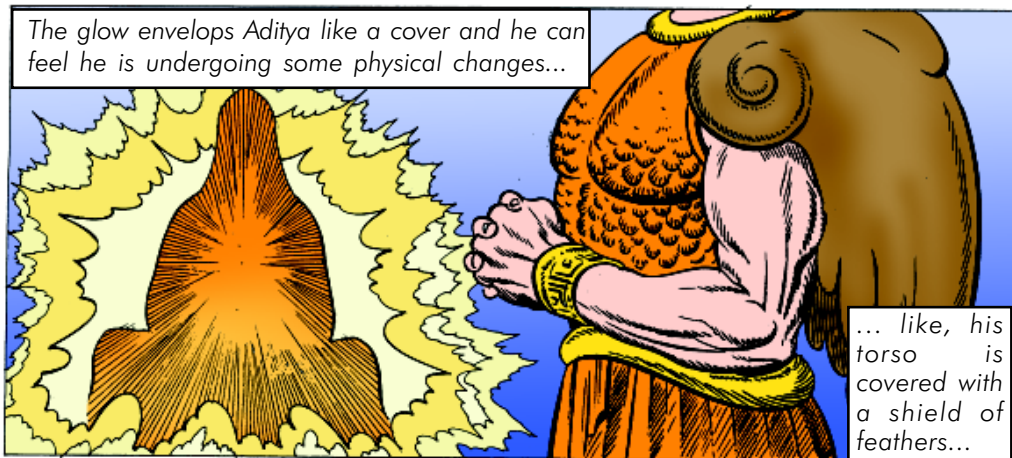
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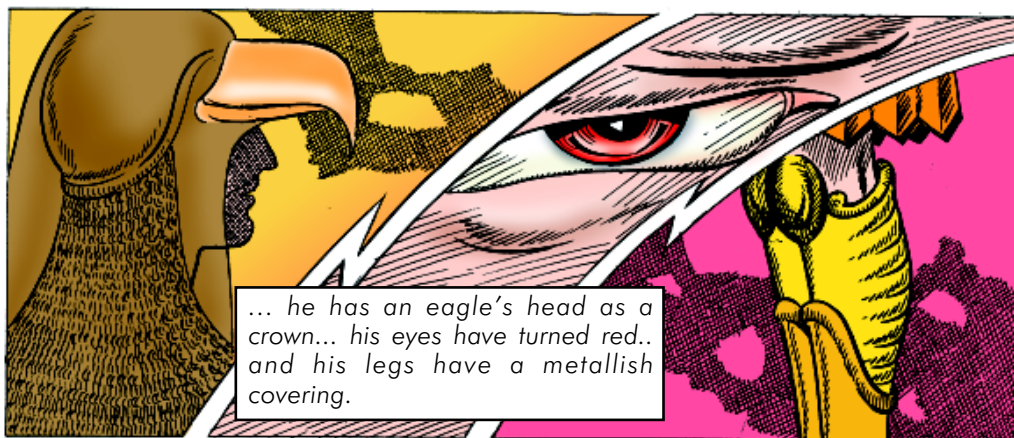


Aditya, the son of the late Prime Minister of Chandrapuri, turns the tables on commander Narendradeva and son Ravindradeva whenever they boast of capturing Garuda, often seen in a mask. King Mahendradeva appoints Aditya as the Prime Minister. As ordained by his father, Aditya worships the idol of Garuda on the seventh full moon night and has a strange experience. The room is engulfed in bright light. The feather placed in front of the idol floats around and gets enlarged in size.

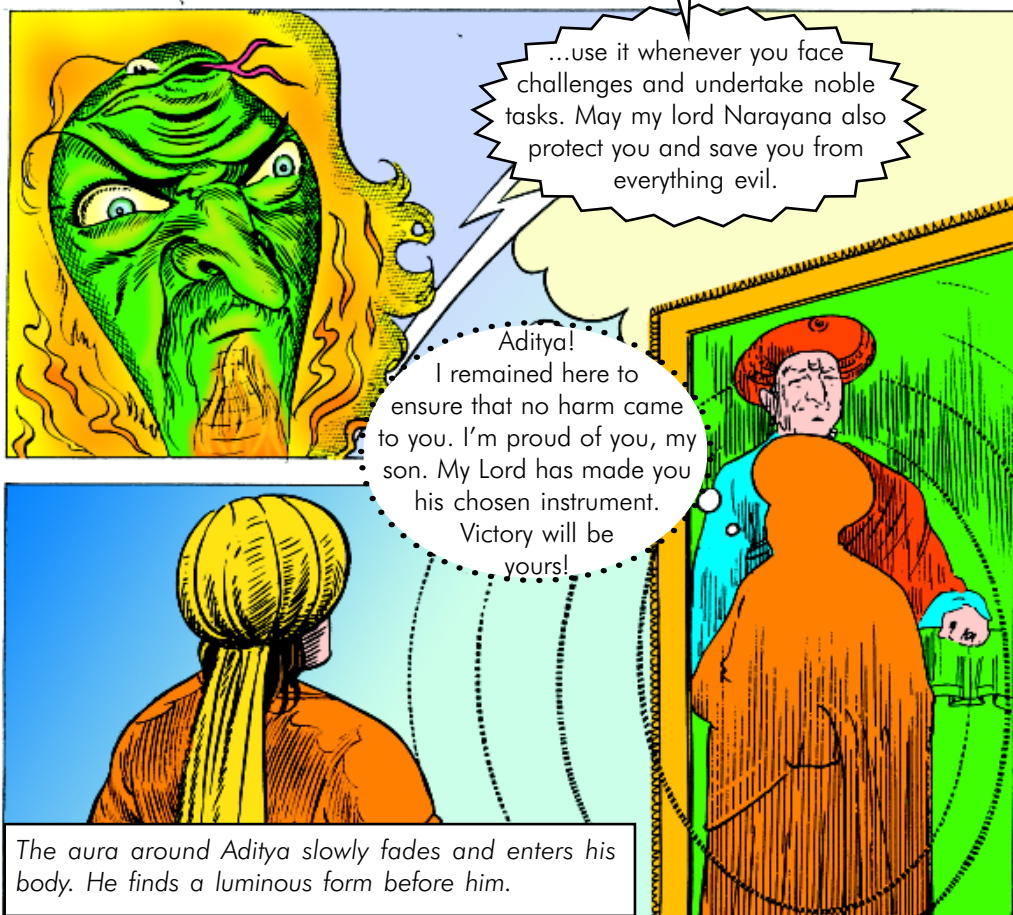
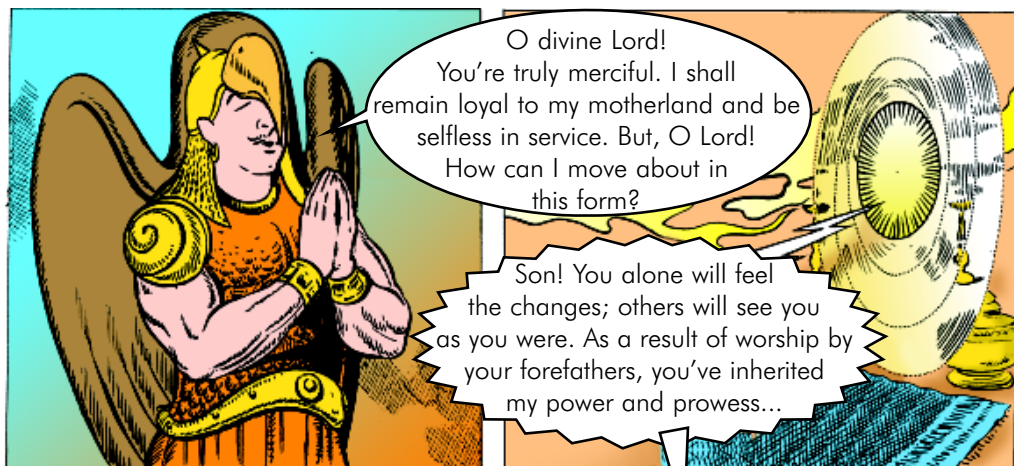
The glow envelops Aditya like a cover and he can feel he is undergoing some physical changes...



... like, his torso is covered with a shield of feathers...



... he has an eagle's head as a crown... his eyes have turned red.. and his legs have a metallish covering.





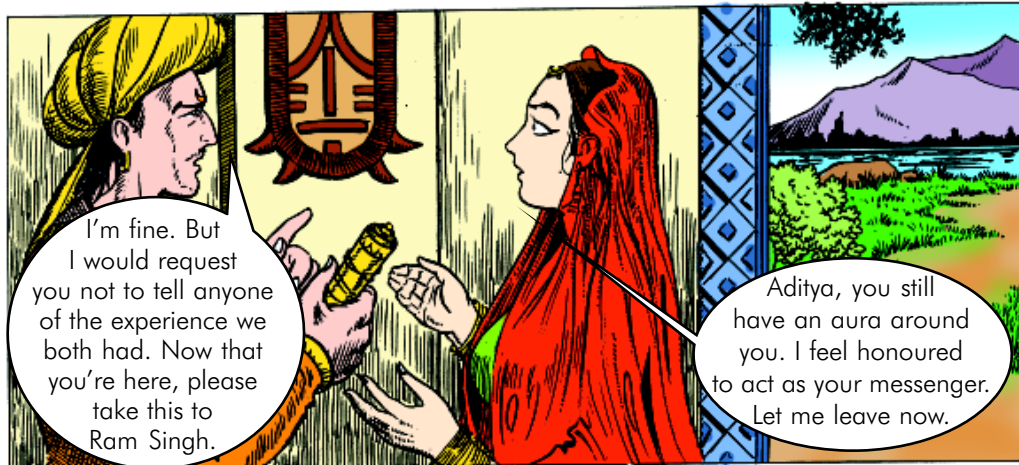
Who could that be...at this hour?

The room once again becomes dark. Aditya hears a knock on his door.



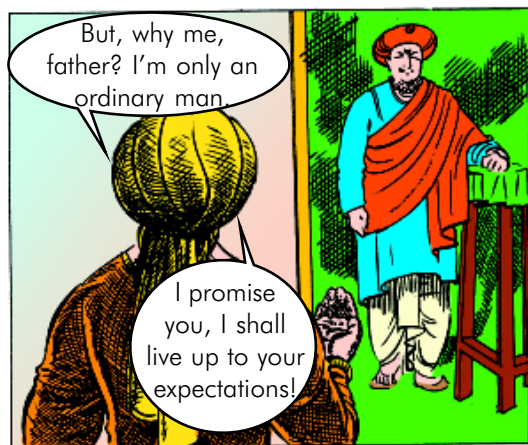
Aruna! You?

As I was leaving, I saw a sudden flash and fell unconscious. When I came round, I found your guards, too, lying unconscious. Are you all right, Aditya?



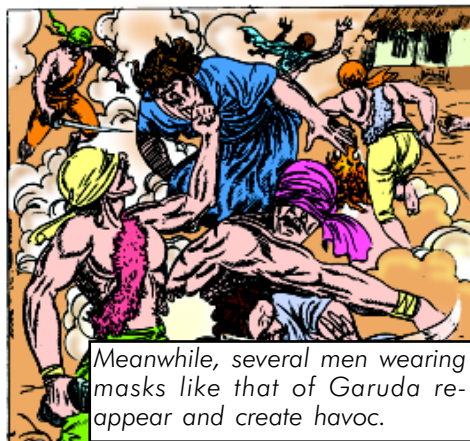
I'm fine. But I would request you not to tell anyone of the experience we both had. Now that you're here, please take this to Ram Singh.

Aditya, you still have an aura around you. I feel honoured to act as your messenger. Let me leave now.



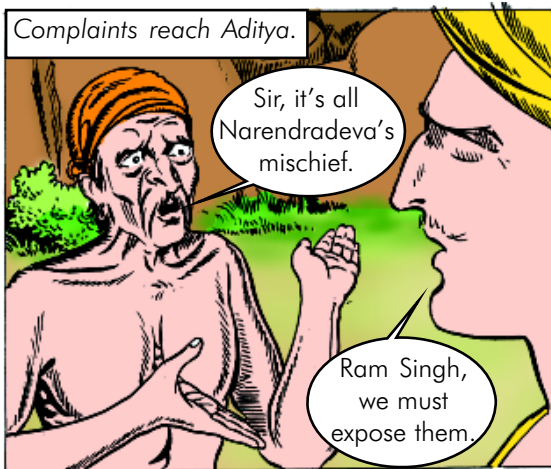
But, why me, father? I'm only an ordinary man.

I promise you, I shall live up to your expectations!

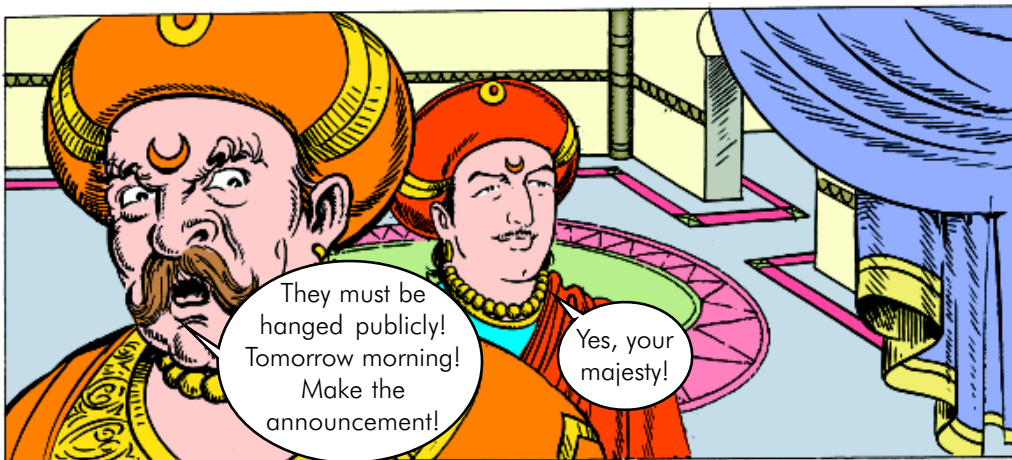


Meanwhile, several men wearing masks like that of Garuda reappear and create havoc.

Complaints reach Aditya.



The next day, in the King's chambers.



The announcement is made all over the kingdom.



Ravindradeva is agitated.



Relax; it is not a holy day!

✿ *Is there any special meaning for the word 'holiday'? asks **Usha Sreedhar** of Bangalore.*

Originally, it was holy day, indicating a religious festival. In olden days, people carried on with their work or business every day. The Jews set apart a day for rest and called it a day of Sabbath. It was Saturday for them. For Christians, the day of rest was Sunday, and for Muslims, the day of rest was Friday. For attending a festival, one had to be away from home. So, a period of time spent away from home came to be known as holiday. With the advent of the modern age, a day when one stopped working or suspended business is a holiday. Except in Muslim countries where the weekly holiday is Friday, Sunday is observed as the universal holiday. In the Roman Catholic Church, attendance is obligatory when any important religious festival is observed. That day is called 'holiday of obligation'. Nowadays, on holidays people relax at home or go to 'holiday-homes' if one's home does not provide a holiday mood! Isn't it an irony?

✿ *Reader **Jagakalia Biswas** of Durgapur wants to know the meaning of the idiom 'to read somebody the Riot Act'.*

An English law of 1715 banned any assembly of 12 or more people if it was feared it would turn riotous and cause disturbance to the public. The police were given powers to take action and quell the riot. To read the riot act to someone, therefore, means to issue a strict warning. For example: Father came in and read us the riot act, and we quietened down!

✿ *I want to know the meaning of 'cats and dogs', writes reader **P. Ranga Jyoti** of Sreekakulam, Andhra Pradesh.*

Cats and dogs mean an assortment of goods offered for sale; they also mean speculative prices especially of securities (shares) not so popular. 'To rain cats and dogs' is a common expression to denote a heavy downpour, unlike normal rain which falls from the clouds in small drops. And when one says "it never rains but it pours", it means that an unfortunate or unhappy event has probably followed an earlier unfortunate or unhappy event.



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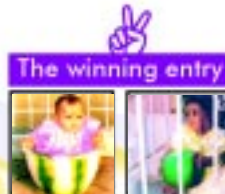
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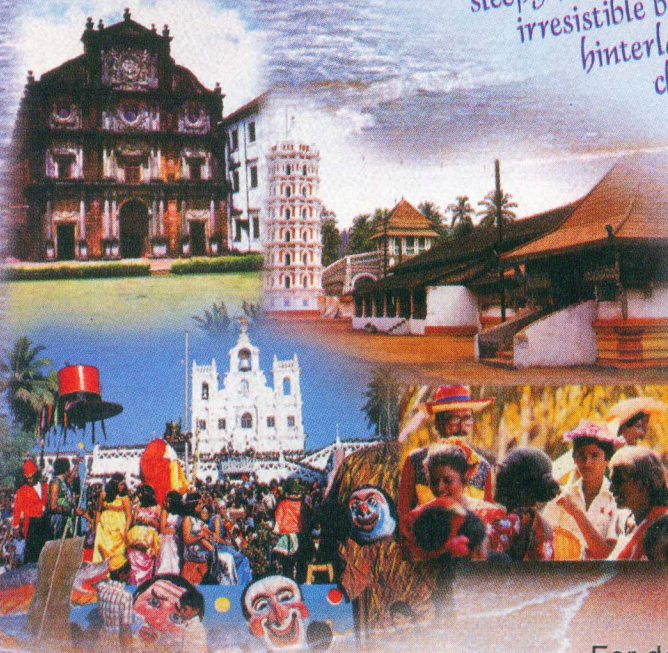
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